

Varadachari's
Annotated
Chess
Masterpieces

By
Vithal
Rajan



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Varadachary's Annotated Chess MasterPieces [Incomplete]

A fictional centenarian chess enthusiast, who has led a very chequered life, introduces each of the 11 One-Act plays based on real chess games. Chess has always been connected with the practice of war, but in reality it is a mind-game, and its stratagems can parallel human contests in any field of engagement. Alekhine, the Russian grandmaster, sacrifices his Queen to a beautiful student; Napoleon imprisoned in St. Helena links every move he makes to a famous victory of his; and Duchamp explains how dadaist art helped him win in chess. The servant Sultan Khan beats the British Champion by following satyagraha; and Albert Einstein, Robert Oppenheimer and Chandrasekhar ponder over chess whether to develop the Atom Bomb before World War II. Humphrey Bogart beats Lauren Bacall and gets her to say 'yes,' while for Fidel Castro winning at the game is part of the victorious Cuban revolution. Duke Medina-Sodonia is warned during a game just before he leads the ill-fated Spanish Armada against England; a Bollywood Mogul, inspired by an Indian film based on cricket, decides to film Das Kapital around chess; a lifer escapes from a penitentiary by playing the game; and Tolstoy and Gandhi discuss how Non-Violence can lead to victory even in chess.

ISBN 81-8157-560-1 (HB) / ISBN 81-8157-561-X (FB)]



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www.writersworkshopindia.com

162/92 LAKE GARDENS KOLKATA 700 045

Telephone 2417 4325 2417 2683 3095 9727

E-mail : profsky@cal.vsnl.net.in

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Rajan



The Collected Works of Vithal Rajan

Vithal Rajan (BA Hons McGill, PhD London School of Economics) worked for several years as Information Officer for Canadian Industries Ltd. (ICI) in Montreal. A special task assigned to him was developing a programme of 'social consciousness' for the company.

Following the intensification of the Vietnam War, he involved himself in the peace movement, and served as a 'mediator' in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in the early 1970's, on behalf of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Commission for Justice & Peace. Later, he was a founder faculty member of the School of Peace Studies, Bradford University, UK.

Following the proclamation of a state of internal Emergency in India by Mrs Indira Gandhi, he felt impelled to return to India, and based at Hyderabad, he has worked in an honorary capacity with several civil society organizations, and especially with 'dalit' communities of very poor women.

He was founder volunteer chair of the Deccan Development Society, which promotes integrated rural development in the semi-arid poverty-stricken Deccan plateau. He is now volunteer Chair, governing body, of the Confederation of Voluntary Associations, which works through community empowerment for communal harmony between poor Hindu and Muslim communities of India. He is advisor to ASP Dalit-Bahujan Cooperatives Federation of AP.

He has been Chair of World Studies, International School of Geneva; Director, Ethics and Education, World Wide Fund for Nature International, Switzerland; and Executive Director, the Right Livelihood Award, Sweden (better known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize').

He lives in Hyderabad, India, with his wife, K. Lalita, a well-known feminist and writer.



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[INCOMPLETE]

Vithal Rajan © September 2005
1-2-16/11, First Street, Habsiguda
HYDERABAD 500 007 AP
Tel: 040-2717-2884
Email: vithalrajan@hotmail.com

CONTENTS

	PAGE
1. Editor's Note	3
2. Alekhine's Greatest Defeat	4
3. The Emperor's Last Victory	10
4. Varadachary the Dadaist	20
5. A Servant Plays for High Stakes	31
6. Apple Strudel, Chess, and Ethics	40
7. The Love Gambit	51
8. The Victory of the Revolution	58
9. The Heretic Queen	64
10. The Filming of Das Kapital	73
11. Chess as Felony	81
12. The Parable of the Chess Game	85

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Editor's Note:

Sri Sri Sri Ramanujan Varadachary is no more; Hyderabad has lost its Centenarian Spiritual-Revolutionary Freedom Fighter; we, his, admirers have lost our Friend, Philosopher and Guide.

Some of us found him one morning peacefully stretched out on the stone bench, where he used to sit and tell us so many stories, outside his modest home, in peaceful sleep everlasting. A last joint still smouldered beside his head like incense that God Himself had lit. He left behind, as far as we know, only two sons, both of whom are reported to be in America. His grandson who had visited us some time ago was contacted but he was also traveling abroad. The final obsequies were therefore performed by us his many admirers in Hyderabad. Both the International and some Ravindra Sangeet were sung outside the electric crematorium. The ashes were immersed in the Bay of Bengal at Pondicherry, where he started his great work as a Spiritual-Revolutionary by my humble self.

Mr. Vedavyas Sharma, CEO, SERVICE, provided me with a small grant, and has given me the task of publishing his collected papers. This is an honored but colossal task. When I expressed my unworthiness to undertake it, Mr. Sharma very kindly asked me only to collect the papers on which he based his many anecdotes about famous chess games spanning over a century. Since I myself have many times sat open-mouthed to listen to his stories, I gladly agreed to undertake the task. Unfortunately, very few from a great storehouse of reminiscence are left to us. On enquiry, I found that lately our master storyteller had taken to smoking 'grass' late in the evening with a few youngsters gathered from the locality – he was such a great soul, that neither social status, education, wealth nor indeed any other social yardstick mattered to him, he was friend to all – and during these sessions he would systematically 'light up' with this precious set of papers. Only eleven stories were left in a state that could possibly be readied for publication. I have arranged them as 'plays,' so that the voice of the master can reach the reader directly. I present these in memory of the greatest man it was my privilege to meet.

Vithal Rajan
Hyderabad 2005.

Alekhine's Greatest Defeat

By Vithal Rajan

CAST

Ramanujan Varadachary – A centenarian spiritual-revolutionary

Vedavyas Sharma – Head of an NGO

The young Ramanujan – A refugee in Paris in the 1920s

Alexander Alekhine – Russian Chess Champion, waiting to become a French naturalized citizen

Cathy Ferrel – American girl student in Paris

Other student chess players

[The stage is divided between the front of a small middle-class house in Hyderabad, present day; and the great hall of the Petit Parisien in Paris, the first of February, 1925. On the lighted left-side is the whitewashed front of the Hyderabad house; above its low green-painted door is the screen for the projection on the chess game. A stone bench, a wooden chair, and a small table are in front of the door, under the suggestion of a small neem tree. Later, as the action moves, this side will be darkened, and the right side of the stage will be lit. Here, there is a suggestion of a long plain hall, with rows of desks with chessboards, behind which sit clusters of students. Desk No: 11 will be in the foreground, and far to the right a long table with a flask of coffee, cigarettes, and a pile of winter coats.

The action opens on the left, with Ramanujan Varadachary [RV], a thin old man wearing a plain white banian and dhoti coming out of the house to meet Vedavyas Sharma [VS], a short, stout bald middle-aged man, in bush shirt and trousers, who is standing uncertainly in front of the house, carrying a jute shopping bag]

RV: Yes, I am Ramanujan Varadachary. What do you want? Oh, you must be that Sharma who wrote to me some days back? Well, I said you could come for a short interview at this hour. Tell me what you want, Mr. Sharma?

VS: Sir, I am head of a civil society organization which will be publishing a booklet, a book with messages for communal harmony, from eminent people like yourself, in the present tense situation...Sir, you are our centenarian freedom fighter, and we want your message to appear alongside that of the President and Prime Minister.

RV: Well, sit down, sit down, Sharma. I don't write much these days – my eyes are all right, but... why don't you ask me some questions and write down my replies; that

should do, I think? I can give you fifteen minutes, after that I must go in to watch that TV comedy series *Kya Hua Is Desh Ko?* I never miss an episode.

VS [hesitatingly *bringing up the jute bag he is holding, and bringing out a bottle*]: Sir, Mr. Kelkar, through whom I sent the letter, said a proper gift to celebrate your centenary of service to the country would be this bottle of red wine, but if I have made a mistake, please forgive me...

RV [*taking the bottle with a glint in his eye, and a lilt in his voice*]: It would be a mistake only if it turns out to be undrinkable. Indian wine? Never heard of such a thing! What does the label say? Hmm...French grapes, grown outside Bangalore, French process, well, I don't believe this, but I am always willing to try a new bottle. How else does one learn? You sit right here, Sharma. I shall go in, get a couple of glasses I haven't used in twenty no, thirty years – and a corkscrew, if I can find one. What sort of a country are we making if you can't buy a corkscrew in the market? [*goes in, and reappears shortly, polishing with loving care two wine glasses*] Let me open the bottle, it's an art in itself y'know? We don't want pieces of cork floating about. Ah! I will let it breathe for a bit. Now, what is it you wanted to know?

VS: Sir, you were with Sri Arobindo during the old revolutionary days. Perhaps, you can tell me something of those days, as background for the message.

RV: Yes, certainly I can tell you a great deal about Sri Arobindo, and his Ashram, and even more about his younger revolutionary days. He took over where Vivekananda left off; he fired the patriotic zeal of all young men of this country – I left the Madras Presidency College after listening to his speech, and followed him to Pondicherry – the French gave us all shelter, from where we could attack the might of the British Empire!

VS: Sir. You are the last of our great freedom fighters, and more – Sri Arobindo called you a Spiritual Soldier of India, and my request is...

RV [*carefully pouring the wine into the glasses*]: Of course, I shall write out a message, today, right now, as we drink this bottle of wine which you very thoughtfully brought along. The import of all real wine was stopped a long time ago... and I didn't even know we had started to make our own, I must tell my grandson to send me another bottle along with his money order. [*delicately sniffs at the bouquet through distended nostrils, carefully tastes a mouthful before slowly drinking it*] Not bad at all, it will do, it will serve. Yes! A very good beginning! It is totally against our ancient culture to deny a place for wine on our tables. What do you think *soma* was? Not some kind of medicine as these theologians make out, but wine, sir, wine, from the southern slopes of the Hindu Kush mountains, grown and drunk by our great Vedic forebears! It was the source of their good health, and if I have lived to be a hundred, it's because of the French wine we drank in Pondicherry! Sharma! Don't drink it like whisky – savor the bouquet, roll it round your tongue!

VS: Sir, in those days of Freedom Struggle, Sri Arobindo, I believe gave spiritual content to politics...

RV: Quite right. So he did. I could tell you a lot about those times. This is the first Sunday of February; do you know where I was exactly 80 years ago to this day? In Paris! Sunday, the first, February, 1925! It was my first winter there and it was dreadfully cold. I was not yet a French citizen then and the British were asking for my extradition to stand trial for sedition, so the Prefect of Police in Pondicherry told me to leave quietly for France. It was on this day, 80 years ago, that I met the greatest chess player of all time – and saw him lose! Are you interested in this story; do you play chess?

VS [*insincerely*]: Sir, it is my favorite game. I used to be a champion in my school days...

RV: Then, I shall tell you the full story. [*pours himself another glass*]. That was excellent, I shall go slow over this one. Now that Vishy Anand is well known there is some interest in chess, but for decades no one in India cared for this king of games, invented by us, of course. This is good wine, and you deserve to hear this good story. Alexander Alexandrowitsch Alekhine, the great Russian, was in Paris, and he declared he would break the world record for blindfold chess by playing against 28 players, 28 groups of players, if you please! [*takes a meditative sip*] How did I meet him, you ask? Émigrés tend to gather together – to explore, to help each other. I was from India, the home of chess, from a very well-known family, and so was he, the son of a Marshall and a member of the Duma, his people had been wealthy, but in Paris we both had to make do somehow – but we were young, and what exploits we had in that queen of cities! [*takes a long sip, lost in thoughts of those gallant days. A minute passes in silence*] But to return. He already had a reputation as a ladies man – but only for older, wealthier women. He had already divorced two such women, and he would divorce two more rich older women, so people gossiped that he was after their money. But, No! Alekhine was a great romantic at heart, otherwise he could never have been the champion he was – he was drawn to women of experience, of mystery, as they were to his matinee idol looks and his piercing gaze. You do not believe? Behold! I tell you of a little affair, conducted blindfold, in front of all, with one very young and most beautiful!

[*The left-side stage darkens and only the voice of RV is heard, while the right-side lights up, applause is heard, and Alexander Alekhine and the young RV make a dramatic entrance, miming his words*] On that record-breaking day, I was his second, to take charge of his Turkish cigarettes and see that he had a constant supply of hot black coffee. The day was cold; we made a dramatic entry into the great hall of the Petit Parisien, in our black cloaks and large felt hats pulled down, and everyone applauded. The newspapers! The cameramen! M'sieu Fernand Gavarry, the President of the Federation des Esches, were all there to greet us. Laying aside our gloves, hats and cloaks on the side-table, Alekhine went from table to table shaking hands punctiliously with all the contenders. He could hardly leave Table 11, the young people from the Ecole Polytechnique Paris. [*a dramatic spot light on a beautiful young girl*] Among the shy students stood this girl, with clear green eyes, and a rosebud mouth, her close black

knitted cap pulled over her pale blonde curls, a tight dark pink pullover shaping perfect breasts, her soft white hands, like lily stems, with long elegant, aristocratic fingers. I could tell my friend, Alexander Alexandrowitsch, was powerfully affected. He was breathing with passion even as I blindfolded him.

[Alekhine, blindfolded, and the young RV by his side, stand at the long table, talking in stage whispers. Spot lights switch rapidly back and forth between Old RV, and Alekhine, as they speak, and the girl, who sits with bent head all the while, except for a rare smile]

Alekhine: I can see her perfectly in my mind's eye, everything, her eyes, her kissable mouth, her breasts, the breasts of Hebe, those long white hands, meant for caressing, Rum, I am madly in love already!

Old RV: He used to call me Rum, you know? For Ramanujan. I never cared for Rum – a beastly drink fit only for sailors! Then when he came back to the table after a few rounds, for strong black coffee and Turkish cigarettes – Alekhine would have nothing else during a Chess tournament, however long the match – he would say something passionate about her.

Alekhine: She is an unfortunate émigré like me, Rum. She is a Russian princess, I am absolutely sure, and I have to be silent for hours, blindfolded, when I should be gathering her in my arms, consoling her!

Old RV: There was no controlling him, absolutely not! He was trembling like a racehorse! Those moments between rounds, for coffee and cigarettes, were exquisitely painful for Alexander Alexdrowitsch!

Alekhine *[drinking coffee, and blowing a smoke ring]*: I bent over the board just now, and I could smell her breath – it's of the cherry blossoms over the Neva, that much of the real Russia she has brought with her! Tell me Rum, is she looking at me? Is she also moved ecstatically, as I am? Heaven cannot be so cruel as to make her indifferent to me!

Young RV: Alexandre! She knows of your attraction! She is too shy to look up. But she is blushing to the tips of her ears!

Old RV: Every moment of that momentous day is fresh in my memory though all those events took place exactly 80 years ago. Look, Sharma, you will better understand what was going on, if I play you the game. There is a traveling chessboard in the drawer of the table, with holes to hold the chessmen. There, Alekhine played with white pieces, Table No 11, the student group from the Ecole Polytechnique had the black pieces. He had divided the openings for the 28 groups. At her table he opened with the Queens Pawn – very romantic! *[plays 1.d4]* Sharma, you move on behalf of the Polytechnique's students. *[Sharma plays 1...d5]* That's right. Let us see how the game goes *[Old RV and Sharma play the alternate moves. 2.Nf3, Nf6. 3.e3, e6. 4.Nc3, c5. 5.dxc5, Bxc5]* All normal, nothing especially significant of the great romance that was building up. Alekhine plays *[6.a3]* and she- she is the lead player in her group, it is clear, she castles defensively, as she should, playing against the world's greatest chess master *[Sharma plays 6...O-O]* Let

us carry on [7.b4, Be7. 8.Bb2, a6. 9.h3, Nc6. 10.Be2, b5] Now Alekhine makes a move that is a clear signal of his pent up feelings for her! He castles! [*plays 11.O-O*] She is not indifferent! She signals her diagonal sidelong glance, see, Sharma? You understand? [*Sharma plays 11...Bb7*] It is at this move, if I remember right, Alexander Alekhine irrevocably committed himself to Her!

Alekhine: Rum, I am going to marry her the moment this game is over. But how can I go empty-handed to her, to ask for her? I have to give her something, something great, that history will record as a mark of my great love!

Old RV: Remark! He was in love, deeply, like only a Russian can be, in a moment, as happens in Paris, even in February. This is very good wine, and you are a very good fellow, Sharma, we should get to know each other. But let us proceed with the game, we are nearing the exciting moment, the *denouement*! [12.Nb1, Rc8. 13.Nbd2, Qd6. 14.Nb3, Nd7. 15.Nfd4] Romantically, Alekhine has moved his cavaliers to the Queen's side. Sharma, mark her reply [15...Nce5.]

Alekhine: See, see, Rum! How deliciously, wantonly, she opens up her bishop file for me! Even a blindfolded man can see her clear intention!

Young RV [*mischievously*]: Have a care my love-lorn friend. She could crush you in there!

Old RV: Let's play the next moves together. [16.Na5, Ba8. 17.a4, Nc4. 18.Nxc4, bxc4. 19.b5, Rfe8. 20.Bc3, e5.] We have gone through these moves rather rapidly, Sharma, though they all had their moments of tension, of exhilaration, when he would bend low over her, their breaths would mingle, or as if by chance, his fingers would tenderly caress hers! And I beside them, privileged to be a silent spectator of a great love!

Alekhine: Rum, I am in a dream, a beautiful dream, that should never end. But I want it to end, to wake up in her arms, look deep into those enchanting eyes forever and ever, and reaffirm my love forever and ever! I will sacrifice my knight to her beauty. [*plays 21.Nc6*]

Old RV: She accepts the knight. [*Sharma plays 21...Bxc6*]

Young RV: My friend, I have seen you do as much for any kitchen wench.

Old RV: Let's play on. [22. Bxc6, Rxc6]

Alekhine: You are right, Rum, I must surrender all, show he was vulnerable to her, only to her! I shall sacrifice my Queen to the future Queen of my life! [*plays 23.Qxd5, Qxd5*]

Old RV: The Great Alekhine had lost to his lady love!

Alekhine [*bending low over Table no: 11, and holding the lady's fingers delicately in his hand*]: Ah, Mam'zelle! You have won my Queen, and you have conquered me! Only a Russian princess was destined to do so! And here I am your slave!

Old RV: Who could resist? I was moved. Even M'sieu Gavarry, the President of the Federation des Esches, wiped away an emotional tear! The lady was totally overcome. She blushed brighter than the pullover she wore. She let Alexander Alexandrowitsch keep possession of her hand.

Lady [*blushing, pulls herself to her feet, and looks at Alekhine*]: Hi! I am Cathy Ferrel, from Iowa. And my husband Jim is over at the next table. We are here in Paris for six weeks for French immersion classes.

Alekhine [*recovering his composure after a great struggle*]: Enchanted, Madame! Enjoy your stay, and command me while you are in Paris! [*He kisses her hand very lightly and leaves the table*]

Old RV: The rest of those tedious hours were passed in silence. Believe me, it took me days to cajole Alekhine back to good humor. 'Iowa! Iowa?' he would say, 'Incredible! How can there be such a place?' [*drains the last of the wine*] This is the truth how the great Alekhine lost a match in 1925 to rank amateurs. It also proves that had the right girl come along, someone not in blessed Iowa, Alekhine might, just might, have married someone young and beautiful, and been happy forever.
[*There is a long pause*]

VS: Wonderful story, Sir! The message for communal harmony... If you will just scribble a few words, Sir, we can publish along with the President's and...

Old RV: You want harmony between all peoples, and that is a very good thing. But how do we harmonize with people with closed up souls, who are afraid to drink wine? This is just not possible. They must first learn to open up, to others, to Nature, to le bon Dieu, who has made us all. I will tell you what I will do, without being false to myself. I will think about something appropriate, and send it to you. I want to rest now.

[*Curtains. The stage darkens*]

The Emperor's Last Victory*[written to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the coronation of Napoleon]**by**Vithal Rajan***CAST:***The Curator of the Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad**Ramanujan Varadachary – a centenarian**Napoleon I – The Emperor in his last days**General Bertrand – His Aide**Madame Bertrand – A loyal wife and subject**[A small ornate table of oriental design is set out in the middle of the stage, with two chairs, a chess board, and a couple of glasses. The chess game is projected on a screen behind the table, so that the audience is able to watch every move. At front left is a podium. The stage is in darkness, except for a spot on the podium.]*

The Curator of the Salarjung Museum: Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Evening! We welcome you to the opening of a new section devoted to rare manuscripts, of social rather than of historical value. On this occasion, it gives me great pleasure to introduce Shri Ramanujan Varadachary, who really needs no introduction to a Hyderabad audience. A centenarian Freedom Fighter, he has always been a friend of your museum. Today, he will be depositing a rare family manuscript in our new section. To give you a glimpse of the treasure that will be made available in time to researchers, I shall request him to read excerpts from a diary kept by one of his ancestors. Shri Varadachary!

Ramanujan Varadachary [after walking up to the podium to thunderous applause, with a thick sheaf of papers]: An 18th century ancestor of mine, who once also carried my own name, was well-known in his time as a great scholar of the Vedas, and one of the largest landowners of the upper Cauvery region. After Haider Ali's conquest of the region, during a chance philosophical meeting with Tipu Sultan, he had a mystical experience, embraced Islam, and took the name of Ali Asghar. Tipu Sultan attached him to his court, returned his vast lands, and when the need arose sent him as a trusted ambassador to the French Court. His diary is full of interesting anecdotes of Court life in Versailles; he has something to say about the famous diamond necklace of Marie Antoinette; he seems to have become enraptured of a beautiful woman painter called... called Elisabeth Louise Vigee Le Brun; he witnessed the guillotining of several aristocrats; and then he became a personal servant-courtier of the Emperor Napoleon, whom he served faithfully even in exile. He returned to India only after Napoleon's death, and since Tipu's kingdom had been taken over by the British, he settled in Hyderabad under the protection of the Nizam. He has left us a marvelous if quixotic account of his journeys, adventures, and his times. The diary was not confiscated by the British, since they considered it of no

consequence, being written in Urdu. One of our first projects will be to bring out an edited version in English, for the general reader.

Since we are honored this evening by a visit of the French Consul-General, and this being the 200th anniversary of Napoleon's coronation, I shall read an interesting account of the Emperor playing chess with his aide-de-camp, General Bertrand, one summer evening in 1818, at Longwood, on the island of St. Helena, in the middle of the south Atlantic, where Napoleon was incarcerated with a handful of his faithful staff, after his defeat at Waterloo. Ali Asghar records that the Emperor was still in full charge of his faculties, when he played this game, though he was to die in three years time, slowly poisoned by arsenic. Present-day doctors suspect that the arsenic was somehow absorbed by his body, perhaps from the wallpaper in his room, or some such source, but not orally ingested. Many of his soldiers believed that his English 'jailer' Sir Hudson Lowe had a hand in his death. A record of this game has been left for posterity by the faithful Bertrand. The conversation between the two was recorded as faithfully as possible by Ali Asghar, who however makes the point that the Emperor had expressed similar opinions in the past during his famous victories. You can watch the game now on the screen, while my colleagues read from the text left by Ali Asghar. Feel free to imagine that the Emperor Napoleon and General Bertrand are on the dais, playing chess! [*Exits. The spot switches off, Napoleon enters speaking, followed by Bertrand.*]

Napoleon: Bertrand, my dear Comte, this evening I want to teach you how under any circumstance a battle may be won. Who knows when France may need our services again? Poor Grouchy, I do not blame him, but his mistake at Waterloo should not be repeated. So let us start with a chess game – it is as good a battlefield as any.

Bertrand: Sire, you have been lately indisposed... and the doctors wish you should not strain yourself...

Napoleon: All nonsense, my dear fellow. I was out of sorts because I missed my Levantine snuff. Why does it take so long? With this fellow, Lowe, sticking his fingers into it, the fragrance is destroyed, I tell you! What does he expect to find, a pistol in my snuff-box? This pettiness of mind bespeaks a nation of shopkeepers. For the last few weeks, I have felt so revolted thinking of his English fingers in my snuff, that I stopped using it, and begged some from Marchand, my valet-de-chambre!

Bertrand [*soothingly*]: Your Majesty, we shall issue another protest.

Napoleon [*seating himself, and taking charges of the white pieces*]: Yes, as I told Lord Amherst just last month, what use are these odious restrictions? How can any man escape, with numerous vessels cruising these waters, with sentinels posted all round from dawn till dusk?

Bertrand: Lord Amherst did offer his services, Sire, to intercede with Sir Hudson Lowe...

Napoleon *[interrupting]*: Crime and hatred towards me are equal in this man's nature. It is necessary to his enjoyment to torture me... But, come, let's play chess and forget this disagreeable English jailer. Our loyal friends in Paris will not let us be on this miserable island, with its English climate, for long, I assure you.

Bertrand: Very good, Sire. *[sits down in the opposite chair]*

Napoleon: Read over and over again the campaigns of Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus, Turenne, Eugene and Frederic. This is the only way to master the art of war. But for now, you can learn from my moves.

Bertrand: Sire, you are too good.

Napoleon: Charges of cavalry are equally useful at the beginning, the middle, and the end of a battle. This time, it will be at the beginning, to flush out your strength. What do you think of this unusual opening?
[moves White King's Knight to Bishop 3_Nf3]

Bertrand *[flattering fulsomely as is his wont, but equally with genuine loyalty]*: Sire! You are ever our Little Corporal, even after a thousand victories! I still see in you the spirit you showed at Lodi! Do you remember, Sire? The Austrian batteries were on the other side of the Adda, focused on this narrow wooden bridge, only thirty feet wide but two hundred yards long. When someone said it was impossible to cross that bridge, you replied: 'Impossible! That word is not French!' You raised your hat on the tip of your sword, above the busbies of your soldiers, and shouting: 'Follow your General,' led us across to victory. No Frenchman hung back then, and the Austrians were flung back like chaff. I am still your aide-de-camp – I follow where you lead!
[moves Black Queen's Knight to Bishop 3_Nc6]

Napoleon: That was my first great victory in that great year of 1796. It was only after that terrible passage of the Bridge of Lodi that I knew I was reserved for a high destiny. But back to the present. You must remember cavalry charges should always be made on the flanks of the infantry. So, the Guard moves forward.
[moves Pawn to King 4_e4]

Bertrand: I have had an able tutor.
[moves Pawn to King 4_e5]

Napoleon: The Guard is relentless in advance.

[moves Pawn to Queen 4_d4]

Bertrand: Lookout, Sire! The cavalry charges the guard!

[moves Knight takes Pawn_Nxd4]

Napoleon: The French cuirassiers will take a toll of the enemy, mon enfant! *[moves Knight takes Knight_Nxd4]*

Bertrand: But observe! The cuirassiers break against massed infantry!

[moves Pawn takes Knight_exd4 - Both are in high humor, laughing and rubbing their hands]

Napoleon: The torment of precautions often exceeds the dangers. Better to abandon one's self to destiny. I move so!

[moves King's Bishop to Bishop 4_Bc4]

Bertrand: Your Majesty, where you lead I follow.

[moves King's Bishop to Bishop 4_Bc5]

Napoleon: Great battles are won with artillery, Bertrand. But artillery is more essential to cavalry than to infantry, because cavalry has no fire for its defence, but depends on the sabre. So, I am bringing up a park of guns, here –

[moves Pawn to Queen Bishop 3_c3]

Bertrand: Several times I have heard you say, Sire, that 'when you determine to risk a battle, reserve to yourself every possible chance of success, more particularly if you have to deal with an adversary of superior talent.' I am against the Victor of Europe. I bring forward my Queen!

[moves Queen to King 2_Qe7]

Napoleon *[pleased]*: Bah! I should have conquered the World! Europe is only a molehill. On the battlefield I am master, but the sea surrounds all battlefields, as the Atlantic surrounds this, our chessboard. No proper Frenchman can stomach the lurching sea, that we leave to the English, and their despicable vices. If we had not lost the battle of the Nile, who knows, from Aboukir I might have taken you all to India, given heart to the Indian armies beaten by that treacherous long-nosed English Oligarch, restored Mysore to the sons of Tipoo Saib, and Maratta to its rightful owners. What Alexander could not do, what the great Genghis Khan avoided, I would have done... and we still might, eh? *[leans forward and pinches Bertrand's ear]*

Bertrand *[flushing like a girl]*: Your move, Sire.

Napoleon: There is no man more pusillanimous than I when I am planning a campaign. I purposely exaggerate all the dangers and all the calamities that the circumstances make possible. I am like an unmarried girl labouring with child. Once I have made up my mind, everything is forgotten except what leads to success.

[Castles on the King's side_O-O]

Bertrand: The enemy advances in full sight.

[moves Queen to King 4_Qe5]

Napoleon: The transition from the defensive to the offensive is one of the most delicate operations in war.

[moves Pawn to King's Bishop 4_f4]

Bertrand *[in some agitation]*: Sire! I have distracted you with my chatter. I regret, I apologize...

Napoleon *[calmly]*: In battle, my dear Bertrand, one does not apologize. If you wage war, do it energetically and with severity. This is the only way to make it shorter and consequently less inhuman. *[thinks]* One apologizes only to the weak. You remember when Mrs. Stuart paid us a visit here on her way back from Bombay, and as we were walking up the steep mountain path, she roughly ordered aside the Chinese coolies laboring under heavy boxes. I gently reminded her to respect their burden, and stood aside to let them pass... Play on, Bertrand.

Bertrand *[questioningly]*: Sire, I have an unfair advantage...

[moves Pawn takes Bishop's Pawn: Check_dxc3+]

Napoleon *[dreamily]*: Do you remember the night before the battle of Austerlitz? That cold night of the first of December, 1805? The huge Russian and the Austrian armies, under the direct command of their Emperors, had 20,000 more men than we had, and 278 guns. We could see their lights twinkling for kilometres away. It was a bitterly cold night, white under a fresh fall of snow. As I rode by, a soldier lit a bale of straw, and held it up by his bayonet. Instantly, Bertrand, as if by magic, several thousand bonfires ringed our camp, while the soldiers shouted: 'Vive L'Empereur!' I had forgotten it was the anniversary of my coronation. I told our soldiers that evening exactly what I would do – the full plan of battle – and how I would defeat the enemy next day. Not one soldier betrayed me, Bertrand, not one. That is how much the French Armies loved their Emperor! I left the right wing weak, as a trap. Remember, Bertrand, it is not the right wing that is always left as a trap! And what followed? I was on horseback by four. The Sun of Austerlitz rose over a clear day.

The Russians left the Prutzen Heights to attack my right, and weakened their centre. I asked Marshall Soult how long it would take him to reach the heights, and he said twenty minutes. We split them asunder, Bertrand! Davoust's Third Corps, which I had hidden away, scattered them across that frozen lake – it was terrible to see so many men, 27,000 killed, and drowned in that icy horror. *[pauses]* My soldiers captured 180 cannon, not bad for a day's work. Remember? Remember and Play!
[moves King to Rook 1_Kh1]

Bertrand *[now savagely in anguish]*: My soldiers decimate your forces, Emperor of the French!
[moves Pawn takes Queen's Knight's Pawn_cxb2]

Napoleon *[unconcerned]*: So they would, so they would. Look, I am a little tired. Get me a good strong cup of Arab coffee, if you can, on this pestilential island. I will take a turn round the house to see if I can spot a French packet on the horizon. Dispatches are due from our loyal friends in Paris. God, this climate makes my legs ache! *[pulls out a spyglass from his pocket and wanders off]*

Bertrand: Madame! Madame Bertrand! The Emperor desires some coffee! Can I help? *[goes off stage in the opposite direction, and then reappears a few minutes later accompanying Madame Bertrand bearing a tray of coffee]*

Madame Bertrand *[setting down the tray on the table]*: How is he today?

Bertrand: Terrible, Madame. That I should live to see this day! His mind is affected with this illness. He, the master strategist, lets me slaughter his army – I mean the pawns – look at that table, half are gone, and he doesn't seem to understand that he is losing, and playing a very bad game at that...

Madame Bertrand: Hush! I hear him approaching. Your Majesty!
[courtesies, and departs]

Napoleon: Ah! Real coffee! *[drinks]* I am revived, mon enfant. Now, where were we? Yes, your attack, so? Well, I am defeated, n'est pas? But a soldier fights on, what? The most important qualification of a soldier is fortitude under fatigue and privation. Courage is only second. At Marengo, I had suffered all the hardships of a common soldier. That terrible forced march over the Great St. Bernard Pass, in that June of 1800. And what a march it was past high pinnacles of perpetual ice, gloomy gorges, and foaming torrents in frightful defiles. And I had to transport an army, with its cavalry and its artillery! Not since the days of Hannibal had an army forced a passage through the Alps! Each soldier became a mule.

A cavalryman walked in front of his horse – if it slipped they would both perish. The descent was far worse than the ascent, for we had to creep past the fort at the foot of Mount Albaredo. We did it at night, with the wheels of the guns muffled with cloth and straw. It was imagination that led us over the Alps. It was a victory for imagination. And then one of the hardest-fought battles, just south of Turino, all on an empty stomach. This good coffee puts me in mind of that chicken cooked by Dunand, a prince among chefs! How was it done now? Four tomatoes, three eggs, a few crayfish, a little garlic - and some olive oil. Delicious! I had him cook it at every battle. We would have lost that battle by three in the afternoon, mon ami, but for Desaix, who ‘marched to the sound of the guns.’ I wish Grouchy had done the same at Waterloo. But my victory at Marengo also took away my brave Desaix. There could never be another General like him. *[thinks]* I shall bring him back to life on this chessboard. Behold! *[moves Bishop takes King's Bishop's pawn: Check_Bxf7+]*

Bertrand *[somewhat nonplussed]*: Your Majesty, I retreat!
[moves King to Queen 1_Kd8]

Napoleon: It is time the Black Queen also departs from the field.
[moves Pawn takes Queen_fxe5]

Bertrand: But behold, Your Majesty! She returns having captured your Castle.
[moves Pawn takes Rook becoming Queen_bxa1=Q]

Napoleon: Bertrand, I could never resist beautiful women. Your Black Queen reminds me of my little Giuseppina Grassini, with her bewitching black eyes. Ah! How she could sing, whether as Gluck's Eurydice or Lully's Hermione! I missed hearing her when Boieldieu opened the Parisian season with his Caliph of Baghdad, but in 1800 you and I were very busy, were we not? Yes, I would take your Black Queen as well, if like the Caliph I could keep a harem. She is anyway in my part of the field, protected by my soldiers and out of harm's way. How will she help you, Bertrand? You have forgotten our early days in Italy, between May of 1796 and January of 1797? At Montenotte, on the 11th of April, 1796, we faced two enemies, 35,000 Austrians under General Jean Beaulieu and 25,000 Piedmontese under General Michael Colli. We split them apart, Bertrand, at Montenotte, with just 4,500 Frenchmen, turned and beat Beaulieu at Dego; and then Colli, at Mondovi. I once told the Austrian Emperor that my title of nobility dates from the battle of Montenotte. Turn and turn about we beat Marshal Wurmser at Lonato, Castiglione, Bassano, Rivoli, and Mantua, splitting his forces every time. The old man could not learn. He said in bewilderment: ‘The boy does not understand the rules of

war.' But I write the rules of war! You should never have let me split your forces, Bertrand! Your Queen is out of the battle!

[moves Bishop takes King's Knight_Bxg8]

Bertrand: I can still protect my King!

[moves Bishop to King 2_Be7]

Napoleon: At the battlefield of Jena, the mighty Prussian army had only posted light troops in front of the high hill of Landgrafenberg, thinking its heights inaccessible to artillery. But we know a thing or two about conquering heights. On the night of October 13, 1806, I myself worked all night long with our engineers by lantern-light blasting a way for the guns to the top. We could then see the Prussian camps glittering below us for 18 kilometres. For the rest of the night, I lay on the frozen ground, wrapped in my cloak, drawing up a plan for Madame Campan's Girls School - the night before our tall Marshall Lannes had run into 35,000 Prussian troops. In the morning Lannes slowly pushed Marshall Hohenloe into open ground, so that I might crush him.

Then, remember, Ney, ever the lion-hearted, lost patience and launched a fiery attack against the Prussian centre, and was caught, just like my Bishop now sitting like a dead duck next to your Rook.

The outcome was not certain till about four in the evening. All would have been lost but for you, good Bertrand, and your steady hand. Jena, where the Prussians lost 25,000 men, was as much your victory as mine. See, how you steady Ney's flank here on this chessboard.

[moves Queen to Queen Knight 3_Qb3]

Bertrand *[muttering]*: You taught me at Austerlitz :Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake. Am I making a mistake? One must be on one's guard against the trickiest fox in Europe...

[moves Pawn to Queen's Rook 4_a5]

Napoleon: After Jena, I was master of Prussia. I visited Frederick the Great's tomb at Potsdam, and sent his sword to the governor of the Invalides. General Rapp told me that if he were me he would keep that sword himself. Do I not have a sword myself, I asked Rapp, the Sword of Sobiesky, that I wore at Austerlitz? Frederick the Great had won one of his greatest battles against France in 1757, at Rossbach. I sent that commemorative stone back to Paris as a curio. Yes, that victory made me master not only of Prussia but also of Europe. But how may you gain victory now? Let us both assess the situation, good Bertrand. In war there is but one favorable moment; the great art is to seize it! One method is that of a schemer and leads only to mediocre results; the other method is the path of genius and changes the face of the world.

Let us reflect on what happened at Wagram. It was May 1809. The Danube was swollen, but we needed to cross it to launch a surprise attack on the vast Austrian army. I designed a unique pontoon bridge that could be thrown across that raging river in minutes to the north bank, where an Austrian Army was encamped. Unfortunately I had trusted the incompetent, and, as it proved later, the disloyal Bernadotte to hold off Archduke Charles. He failed catastrophically, and even my base on Lobau island was swept over by Austrian guns. My indomitable comrade, Marshall Lannes kept the Austrians back with furious charges, and then had both his legs blown off.

I forgot about the battle, and ran to his side. You know what he said? ‘May you live and save the army!’ Had he lived he would not have swerved from the path of duty like some of the others. Bertrand! I found him a dwarf but lost him a giant.

Well, everything was still in the balance. At the height of battle, Massena was wounded, but continued to direct from a carriage, though in extreme pain. I shouted to the troops: ‘Who fears death when we see how the brave are prepared to meet it!’ Then, at the critical moment, Macdonald came at the head of a column of a hundred guns. The Austrian artillery wheeled into two parallel lines of fire, and cut down his 16,000 men till only fifteen hundred were left. Macdonald’s march was marked for miles with the dead and dying. But he was unstoppable till he pierced the enemy’s centre and secured our victory. I made him a Marshall of France that evening. He told me: ‘Sire, we are now united forever, in life and in death!’ That terrible march was our lifeline, Bertrand, as this one is, in which Macdonald once again comes to the rescue of his Emperor!

[moves Rook to King’s Bishop 8: check_Rf8+]

Bertrand: I can still meet this challenge easily!

[moves Bishop takes Rook_Bxf8]

Napoleon: I remind you, Wagram was bloody, but victory was ours!

[Bishop to King’s Knight 5: check_Bg5+]

Bertrand: I protect my King!

[moves Bishop to King 2_Be7]

Napoleon: Victory belongs to the most persevering.

[Bishop takes Bishop: check_Bxe7+]

Bertrand: My King is a soldier like you, Your Majesty!

[King takes Bishop_Kxe7]

Napoleon: The victory at Ulm, on the 20th of October 1805, was won without a battle. We outmaneuvered General Mack, and he surrendered with his 36,000 Austrians. I stood in front of a bivouac for five hours to accept their arms as they filed out.

I felt only sympathy for them. I said: ‘Gentlemen, war has its chances. Often victorious, you must expect sometimes to be vanquished.’ It is always wiser to grant an honorable capitulation to a garrison which has made a vigorous resistance than to risk an assault.

[Queen to Bishop 7: check_Qf7+]

Bertrand: Now, as ever, Sire, you are the victor!

[King to Queen 1_Kd8]

Napoleon: Do not lose heart, Bertrand. Recollect, my good Bertrand! Halfway through this game, I reminded you of our glorious victory at Austerlitz. The night before the battle, I told all our soldiers my plan of battle; how I would leave the right wing weak as a trap. But I warned you, my dear, loyal enemy, that it is not always the right that forms the trap. This time, the left held a trap, but you did not heed. I reminded you of Desaix's bold charge at Marengo, when, as he said, though the battle was almost lost, there was still time to claim a victory. Did you not see him in my Bishop? Then, I reminded you how we divided the Austrian forces at Montenotte, but you led your Queen to a useless corner. Bertrand!

Bertrand! What shall I do with you! I even reminded you how you yourself had steadied Ney's rash dash at Jena. At last I brought to mind that terrible battle of Wagram. You should have seen Marshall Macdonald in my Rook. By the time we came to the example of Ulm, it was too late to save you. But never mind. A bad but lucky General is worth two good ones. And you must be lucky to have been my aide-de-camp for so long.

[Queen to Bishop 8: check-mate_Qf8#. They rise from the table, and prepare to take a walk]

Napoleon: Bertrand, let us inspect the English guard posted to keep us in. This Hudson Lowe may be the best jailer Wellington could find, but he does not understand soldiers. A soldier will do anything if led resolutely. He understands discipline, for he knows discipline in the army saves his life. These sentinels wish to be soldiers - are trying to be soldiers. Let us put French hearts into them. En avant, mon enfant!

[Napoleon leaves taking Bertrand's arm]

[Curtain]

Varadachary the Dadaist

by
Vithal Rajan

CAST:

Marcel Duchamp – the founder of Dadaism

Ramanujan Varadachary – a Centenarian Spiritual-Revolutionary of Hyderabad

The Young 'Ramon' Varadachary – an assistant to Marcel Duchamp

Georges Koltanowski – the Belgian Chess Champion

Vedavyas Sharma – an NGO leader of Hyderabad

[*The present in Hyderabad. Varadachary is walking up and down in deep thought, in front of his lower middle-class house, next to a school wall, and under a neem tree. Sharma appears from left and stands hesitating to disturb him.*]

Varadachary: It's no use bugging me for that message for your book. As you can see, I'm very busy, and till I get a moment's rest, I will not write it. That's final!

Sharmaji: No, no, Sir! I would not dream of disturbing you, only my friend from Bangalore brought me a bottle of red...*[holds up a bag with a bottle]*

Varadachary [*cheering up*]: And you quite rightly brought it round. I am the person to teach you a taste for wine. I will get glasses and the corkscrew! [*vanishes inside through the low green door at back of stage and reappears with glasses and corkscrew*]. Now, my friend, let us open this, and see what memories it brings to life! [*suits action to words*]
You know what I was thinking of just now? How to start a real artists club here. There can be no revolution without art!

Sharmaji: Guruji, our city has many artists...

Varadachary [*testily*]: Businessmen, all! Making money by peddling a skill. A carpenter is an artist. No, I mean Art! Something that will break boundaries separating art from everyday life, which will expropriate popular culture and theatre, which will confront the audience – which will put chance, collage, abstraction, audience confrontation, eclectic typography, sound and visual poetry, simultaneity, all together in one event, one non-event – that is art! You are silent? You can only think of a commodity with a price tag? I do not blame you! You did not meet Marcel Duchamp, the Dadaist! I myself knew nothing about real art when I was driven out to Paris by the British police. I was in a cold, foreign city, I was poor and hungry. I was playing chess in a café with another Indian refugee, saying aloud that just three months before I myself had been a 'dada' in Pondicherry, when this man stopped and looked into my face. He was like a hawk, with long chin and a big hook nose – it was Marcel Duchamp! 'You were Dada in India? Remarkable!' he says. 'You must then pose for me.' That is how we became friends. You

want to see his portrait of me as a chess-player? Here it is, I have treasured it all my life!
[Painting No: 1 is projected on the whitewashed façade over the door, which acts as a screen]

Sharmaji: With respect, I can make out nothing...

Varadachary [*comfortably*]: That is because you know nothing about art. If you look you will recognize my nose. Every art movement of the last hundred years has come from Dadaism - Surrealism, Constructivism, Pop- and Op-Art, Conceptual Art, Minimalism – everything. Marcel pushed us beyond to anti-retinal art, making the viewer the artist, completing by a mental process what the other has begun – like a chess game; in fact Marcel was a dedicated chess-player, did you know that? Have some wine. I became his assistant, and that is how I discovered Europe and America. He had returned to Paris for the Chess Championship, and I went with him to New York to help him finish his masterpiece, the masterpiece of Western Civilization; *La Mariee mise a nu par ses celibataires, meme*, or The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even. Mark the 'Even!' Till now no one is certain; it's like a throwaway phrase, like, enough, already. The word came to Marcel without his even looking for it. And mark how this great work arises even – ah, we come to 'even' again - out of his name MARiee and CELibataires – Marcel. Magnifique! You want to see it? Here I show you a picture [*Picture No: 2*]

Sharmaji [*frankly*]: I can make nothing of it.

Varadachary: It is what Americans – God Bless them – call The Large Glass, because it is nine feet high and five and a half feet wide. It is in the Duchamp gallery of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. But it is nothing without your imagination. It is nothing without Marcel's careful notes, diagrams, sketches, drawings, musings, preserved by me in the famous Green Box! Scholars have studied the Green Box for years and have come to no agreement. How can they? Each person has a different history, a different perspective, and at each moment stands at a *new* moment of 'indecisive reunion,' to quote Marcel himself. And it is this work of art that got Marcel one of his greatest chess victories in Paris, in the International championships of 1929, against the Belgian champion, Georges Koltanowski. George couldn't understand how he had lost, and that too in so few moves, like an amateur, and came to our atelier the very next day to try and figure it out. I can still imagine the scene... [*light on another part of the stage sketches a Parisian atelier, an easel, contraptions, and a movie projector. Marcel and the young 'Ramon' Varadachary are lounging about laughing in their smoking jackets, while Koltanowski sits perplexed*]

Duchamp: Indeed, Georges! The idea how to win that match came from the Bride herself and her nine suitors! Ramon can project the pictures again, if you like!

Koltanowski: But seriously my friend, there is much I do not understand...

Duchamp: Nor do I, but does it matter? What is *to understand*? It is perhaps a machinery of sexual desire, perhaps not. It depends on the viewer, the reconstructor. Some call this a

piece of art, Ramon here calls it the greatest work of art. I call it a *hilarious object*. It is not meant to be looked at, but read through as amorphous a literary text as possible, and the two, glass for the eye and text for the ears prevent each other from taking either an esthetic or literary form. It is simple.

Old Varadachary [*spot on him*]: This is confusing. The Bride of Marcel's work could only be an internal combustion engine, running on her secretions of love gasoline, do you follow? The key is the notion of a mysterious female power that is both passively permitting and actively desiring. Look at another picture [*picture No: 3*] Yes that is very clear. What do we see? A Halo of the Bride, perhaps the Milky Way, and what emanates from the bride is *the bride herself*, represented 'cinematically' at the moment of her *blossoming*.

Sharmaji [*a little irritated*]: It may or may not be so. I am only an NGO worker not a modern artist...

Old Varadachary [*soothingly*]: That is why you see it in correct perspective – as maybe or may not be so. Koltanowski was similarly impatient.

Koltanowski: Marcel, I am talking about chess!

Duchamp: Georges! So am I! Behold the nine bachelors! Does nothing come to mind? Eight plus one, surely? They are not fully men but 'malic moulds,' malic between *phallic* and *male-ish*. Each one has a special livery, for they are priest, department-store delivery boy, gendarme, cuirassier, policeman, undertaker, flunky, busboy, stationmaster. All male occupations, you must follow this closely – Ramon, show the liveries! [*Picture no: 4*]

Koltanowski [*angrily*]: You are trifling with me!

Duchamp [*with concern*]: On the contrary, dear Georges! You asked, and I, I am trying in my best way possible to explain the source of my inspiration. I shall spare you a full description of the mechanical process of love-making – all controlled by the Bride, you must always remember – enough to say the clockwork mechanism causes two battering rams to move up and down, loosening as they do so the bride's clothes and causing them to fall. The nine bachelors are important to this process, I hope you agree?

Koltanowski [*tired*]: I am willing to agree to anything, Marcel. I just thought I might get a hint about that game, which I lost so very badly, I cannot understand myself...

Duchamp: Oh, that game! Of course that's why you came here! Ramon, let's play that game all over again, so that Georges can see how The Bride and her suitors helped me win. [*Ramon Varadachary and Duchamp quickly set up a chess board*] Let us start dear Georges, and replay yesterday's game. You move first. [*1. Koltanowski d4, Duchamp Nf6; 2. Koltanowski c4; Duchamp e6; 3. Koltanowski Nc3, Duchamp d6; 4. Koltanowski*

e4, Duchamp b6; 5. Koltanowski f4] There what do you see! My black Queen, urgent, sexual up above, and the pawns ranged like her suitors down below! My inspiration!

Koltanowski [*suspiciously*]: I see nothing of the kind!

'Ramon' Varadachary: M'sieu, you must visualize the movement of the mechanism in his great work in order to play out the scenario. Chess like art has nothing to do with physical reality, but it is a mental exercise.

Duchamp [*proudly*]: That is the Hindu explaining better than me, the incidental artist. You must now see the parallel between chess pieces and my suitors – they could be mine since I became a woman!

Koltanowski [*rising*]: I think this game as you call it has gone on far enough. I am a serious player of chess, and I did not come here to be mocked; so I shall take leave of you, Sir!

Duchamp [*rising and restraining him with a hand on his arm*]: I am deadly earnest, dear Georges! Ramon show M'sieu a photo taken of Rose Salavy by the greatest photographer of our times, Man Ray. [*picture no: 5*] Stylish woman, is she not? That hat [*blows a kiss with his fingers*]. But that is also me, dear Georges – Rose Salavy – *eros c'est la vie?*

Koltanowski [*roaring with good-natured laughter*]: I'm glad le bon Dieu made me a chess player and not an artist. I grant you have special inspiration, but still at what point in our little chess game...

Duchamp and 'Ramon' Varadachary together: Trébuchet! Trébuchet! [*Ramon flashes another picture No: 6*]

Koltanowski: *Nom du Nom!* It is nothing but a coat-hanger nailed to the floor! What madness!

Duchamp: Consider, my good Georges! Like this, it will trip up anyone. In chess, we call a trébuchet a pawn move that trips up a big piece. Hence it is logical to call this a trébuchet. Am I right? Right.

Old Varadachary [*spot on him*]: In the 13th century the Dominican monk Jacobus de Cessolis, titled the most famous of his sermons *Liber de moribus Hominum et officiis Nobilium ac Popularium super ludo scacchorum* – in other words: On the Customs of Men and Their Noble Actions with Reference to the Game of Chess. These popular sermons were known as 'the chess moralities,' intended to give instruction to all ranks of men by means of instances drawn from Biblical, and modern history, and – this is important – using the chessmen as typical of the various classes of men.

Koltanowski: I fail to understand what all that has to do...

Duchamp: But you will, my good Georges. In these 'chess moralities' pawns represented 'the poor cleric or parish priest.' So, I spring my trébuchet with my bishop, a poor enough fellow when playing against the Belgian master! So! [*plays 5...Bb7*]

Koltanowski: Bah! That is no trap. [*plays 6.Bd3*]

'Ramon' Varadachary: Please, M'sieu Koltanowski, do not dismiss so lightly the ancient symbolism. [*Duchamp plays 6...Nbd7*] Mark the pawns in front of the knight. The placement of each trade is crucial. For instance, the smiths and city guards are placed in front of the knights because smiths are responsible for making bridles, saddles and spurs, and the city guards receive their military training from the knights. Permit me to show you their pictures. [*Pictures 7 and 8*]

Koltanowski: This is such tomfoolery! Let us get on with the game! [*plays 7.Nf3*]

Duchamp: Certainly. [*plays 7...e5*, and asks anxiously] Maybe you accept this move as another trébuchet?

Koltanowski: No, Sir ! I do not! And what is more, I do not care! [*plays 8.d5*]

Duchamp [*plays 8... g6*]: Perhaps, the descending pawns may remind you of another of my works. Ramon, show our friend The Nude Descending the Staircase!

'Ramon' Varadachary: With the greatest of pleasure! [*picture No: 9*] The Nude's destiny as a symbol stems from its aggregation of avant-garde events: the birth of cinema; the Cubists' fracture of form; the Futurists' depiction of movement. Shall I go on?

Koltanowski: No, thank you, I think you make a joke of everything to distract me. But I shall find out the key move, no mistake this time. [*plays 9.O-O*]

Duchamp: But the nude continues to descend. [*plays 9...exf4*, and sings]

Pauvre joueur de bilboquet

A quoi penses-tu

Je pense aux filles aux mille bouquets

Je pense aux filles aux mille beaux culs

Koltanowski [*angrily*]: Sir! I shall put an end to your whore! [*plays 10.Bxf4*]

Duchamp: Another priestly trébuchet? [*plays 10...Bg7*]

Koltanowski [*more calmly*]: Let us see. [*plays 11.e5*]

Duchamp: You want me to be grave. Very well. [*plays 11...dxe5*] Ramon! Show our very dear Georges our *jaconde aux mustaches* [*picture No: 10*]

'Ramon' Varadachary [*seriously as if giving a lecture*]: The Mona Lisa becomes a man - *not a woman disguised as a man*, but a real man. And please repeat loudly the title letters: *L.H.O.O.Q.* in French, if you please!

Koltanowski: Gentlemen! Please! Do not make me laugh, chess is serious work. [*plays 12.Nxe5*]

Duchamp: I also play chess very seriously. I would leave art for chess, or so people say. [*plays 12...O-O*]

Koltanowski: I remember it gets tricky here. [*plays 13.Qd2*]

Duchamp: That is because you ignored my warning! [*plays 13...Nxd5*]

Koltanowski [*plays 14.Nxd7*]: This is a good move!

Duchamp: But this is unexpected, and very tempting! [*plays 14...Nxf4*]

Koltanowski: I had to take your rook. [*plays 15.Nxf8*]

Duchamp: Yes, that's the trébuchet baited by a bishop! [*plays 15...Bd4+*] Check!

[*Koltanowski laughs, shakes his head, ponders and then gets up to go*]

Koltanowski: An enjoyable evening, gentlemen, and an object lesson. But I do wish you made art which we can all like and understand.

Duchamp [*holding on to his hand*]: After the massacres in Belgium just a decade ago, what would you like me to paint, Georges? Rotting bodies in trenches? Soldiers drinking tea as rats gnaw at the legs of dead friends in no-man's-land? Human guts spilling out? Eternal cries of agony? What shall I paint?

Koltanowski: I hadn't thought of that... yes, go on painting the nude descending the staircase. Goodnight to both of you! [*goes out*]

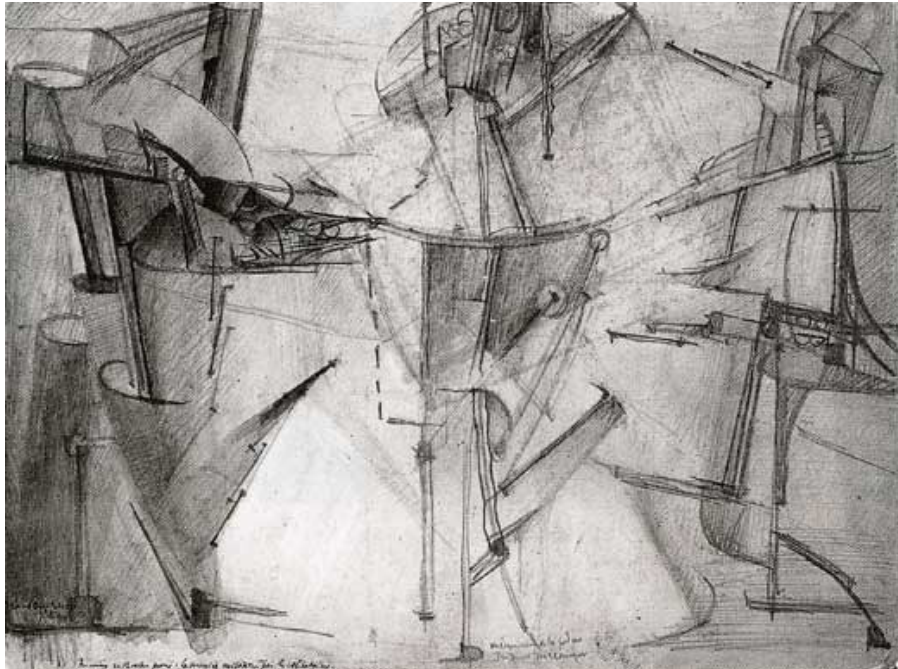
[*Curtain*]



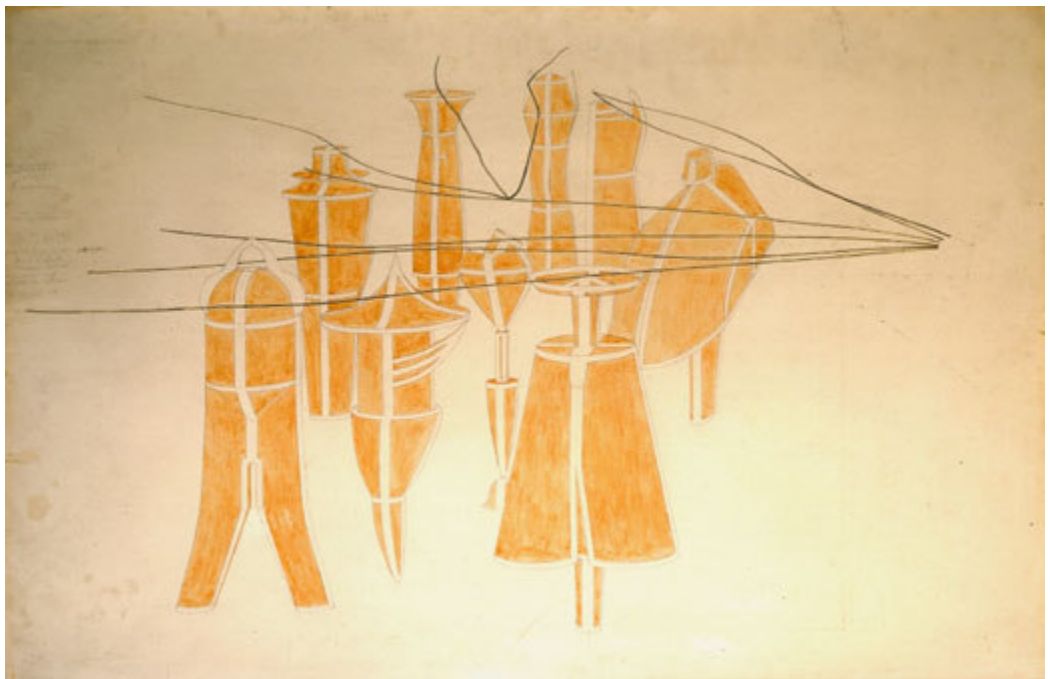
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Picture 3



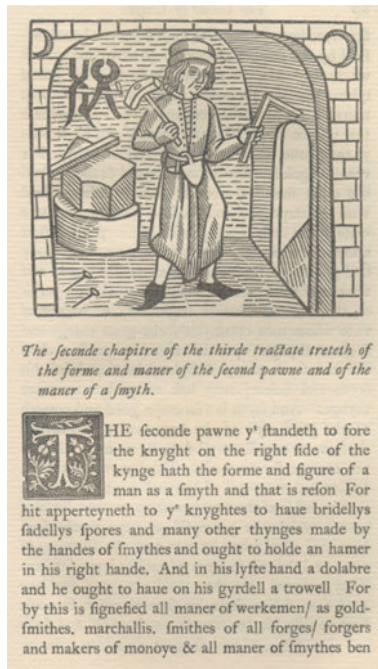
Picture 4



Picture 5



Picture 6



Picture 7 and



Picture 8



Picture 9



Picture 10

A Servant Plays for High Stakes

by Vithal Rajan

CAST

Sir George Thomas – British Chess Champion, 1923, 1934, and world-class cricket, lawn tennis and badminton player

Mr. Frederick Yates – British Chess Champion, 1913,1914,1921,1926,1928,1931

Mr. William Winter – British Chess Champion,1935,1936 and a radical

Mr. Reuben Fine – American Chess Champion, and a writer of chess books

Nawab Sir Umer Hayat Khan Tiwana – The Indian Herald of King George V

Mir Sultan Khan – a personal servant of Sir Umer's, and British Chess Champion, 1930,1931,1932

The young Ramanujan Varadachary – a temporary servant in Sir Umer's household

The old Ramanujan Varadachary – a respected centenarian Freedom Fighter of Hyderabad

Varadachary [*Spot on him, darkened stage*]: As the oldest chess player of the city, it gives me great pleasure to declare the Chikadpally Chess Club open. May all you youngsters master this noble game. I am sure you all want to emulate young Vishy Anand, and become grandmasters. It may interest you all to know that India once produced an even great chess master, and that I was his coach. Have any of you heard of Sultan Khan? No? Another tragedy of the Partition! He belonged to Sargodha district of Western Punjab of Undivided India. He was as Indian as you and me. I know, I coached him... You want to learn more? Then listen. It was in London, on a cold frosty October morning in 1932, and the Round Table Conferences to determine India's destiny were coming to an end. Sultan Khan and I were in Sir Umer Hyat-Khan Tiwana's entourage ...[*spot goes out gradually as he speaks, and the stage is slowly lit*]

[*London, a cold frosty October morning, in 1932. Open-plan stage, with suggestions of an opulent flat in a fashionable part of town, cluttered with Oriental knick-knacks, a large divan with embroidered silk cushions, a Persian carpet, and a tiger skin on the floor. Large windows with silk curtains to the left brighten the room. On the back wall, above the divan is the screen for projection of the chessgame. A door to right opens on to the street. A group of happy Englishmen are depositing a rail-thin differential Indian, dressed in the clothes of a gentleman's gentleman, at the door.*]

Sir George Thomas: Thank you, very much, Sultan Khan, for that superb display. My friends at Lord's will realize there are other sports than cricket, what?

William Winter: Sorry, if it's delayed you, old chap. Hope the Nawab isn't put out, but damn it showing your chess skills to those stuffed men in the pavilion was far more important, surely, than another damned ceremony at the Palace.

Frederick Yates: We are very late, and we are sorry. I had better come in and help smooth things over. Sir Umer knows me, and I will see to it he doesn't vent all his spleen on you, Sultan! I will throw in the names of a couple of dukes to mollify him!

Voice of Sir Umer is heard off stage: Ramanuj! Kahan sab ke sab margeye! [An Indian Nawab in his sixties, balding with a fierce white cavalry moustache, struggles to button himself into a scarlet uniform as he strides across the stage in very bad humor, while Varadachary runs to open the door]

William Winter [*smoothly, but with suppressed sarcasm*]: Ah, Sir Umer! Sorry we are dreadfully late, but we were held over at Lord's by my uncle, Sir James Barrie, Baronet, you know, Sir – Chancellor of Edinburgh University, a famous writer, and personal friend of His Majesty's? Gentlemen, I think you all know Sir Umer Nawab Hayat Khan Tiwana of the Punjab, Colonel of His Majesty's Bodyguard! [*They all shake hands with Sir Umer*]

Sir Umer [*confused and blustering*]: Sir James, Sir George, Mr. Yates, and even you, Mr. Winter, you are all very welcome to my humble abode. I am the *Indian Herald* of His Gracious Majesty, the only one I may say. This fellow has been absent all morning, and I am still not dressed! I have to be in the saddle within the hour! Sultan Khan! Look at my boots – they are filthy! I will be disgraced! Ramanuj! Get to the kitchen and make me a cup of tea! *Jaldi! Jaldi!* [*Varadachary vanishes into the kitchen*]

Sultan Khan [*goes down on his knees, spits on his handkerchief, and rubs it on Sir Umer's boots*]: *Huzoor!* I cannot get our boot-polish here. Polish here does not take well. See, *Huzoor!* I try all day yesterday.

Sir Umer: Nonsense! Sultan Khan, Nonsense! London is the greatest City in the World. You have not looked in the right shops, ask other servants, and look, buy – buy in Harrods – instead of playing chess all day!

Sir George Thomas: There is some truth in what Sultan Khan says, Sir Umer. That beautiful Punjab leather of your boots deserves only Indian polish.

Sir Umer [*somewhat mollified*]: How true, Sir George. And this cold climate, you must excuse me for pointing out, makes everything stiff and hard. But someone mentioned Sir James Barrie, Vice-Chancellor of Edinburgh University – he is not with you? What a pity. I respect learning, Sir, I myself am a product of Acheson College, Lahore, best college in the world, if the truth be known, better than anything you have in Oxford or Cambridge. I am loyal, Sir, loyal to my alma mater. We, Tiwana people, are loyal to the core. None of you may know it, but it's known all over India, without the Tiwana regiments there wouldn't have been an Englishman left in all of Hindustan!

Mr. Frederick Yates [*a little wonderingly*]: How may that be, Sir Umer Hayat Khan?

Sir Umer [*very firmly*]: Umer, or Malik Umer Hayat Khan Tiwana, at your service, Sir! [*bows proudly*] I come from the great Tiwana clan of the Punjaub. In my district of Sargodha, I am known as the Ruler of Kalra! The Hayat Khans are only a family – a great family no doubt – but only a family. Nawab Muhammed Hayat Khan and I once ceremoniously exchanged turbans in brotherhood, and since then I have added ‘Hayat Khan’ to my titles, as no doubt the Nawab Sahib has added ‘Tiwana’ to his. The Tiwanas, Sir, stood by the British during the treacherous Mutiny of 1857. My ancestor was by the side of the great John Nicholson at Kashmiri Gate, during the Relief of Delhi, but, alas, was unable to save his life! For three weeks, he had fought beside him on horseback, every evening changing into a fresh uniform. Do you know why, Sir? He would split the seams of his jacket sabering the mutineers!

Mr. William Winter: You have every right to feel so proud of your clan, Sir Umer, since they have shed so much Indian blood in defence of the English!

Sir Umer [*with a suspicious look at Winter*]: Anyway, Sultan Khan, don't stand here gaping, man! Get me ready. I must attend on the King-Emperor within the hour. If I may be so rude, gentlemen, I must leave! But all of you are more than welcome here tomorrow night for dinner. I beg you to come, and I shall not hear of any refusal. They will all be here, our people from the Round Table Conference, the Aga Khan himself, the Nawab of Chhatari, the Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, the Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk, Sir Syed Ameer Ali, Sardar Aurangzeb, the Maharajahs of Bikaner, Jodhpur, Jaipur, Cooch-Behar and others. It will be an honor! Sultan Khan, unless you can get my boots in better shine, I may as well join the wretched Congress Party!

[*Without waiting for any reply, but after a deep bow, Sir Umer hustles Sultan Khan inside and shuts the door.*]

William Winter [*irrepressibly*]: Well, it will certainly be an honor to be waited on at dinner by the greatest grandmaster of England!

[*Stage darkens. When lights come on again, Sultan Khan is all alone, plumping up the cushions on the divan. We can hear Varadachary rattling pots and pans in the kitchen. The doorbell rings. He goes to open the door, to find William Winter and Reuben Fine, an American Chess Champion standing outside. They shake hands and come in, William Winter carelessly tosses his hat and coat on the divan, while Sultan Khan collects them and Reuben's coat hastily to hang by the door*]

William Winter: Is the Nawab gone? Thank God! I brought Reuben here for he wants to talk to you, my friend. And you, and the Nawab and his gang, may be leaving soon for your country, so this may be his last chance to talk seriously with you about chess.

Reuben Fine [*shyly*]: I hope you don't mind the intrusion, Mr. Khan, but I was fascinated by your play. You use tactics very different from ours. I hope you will enlighten me, you see, I am writing a book on chess masters and their strategies.

Sultan Khan [*simply*]: Sahib, what I know is at your service, and at the service of Winter Sahib.

William Winter: Come, come, come, Sultan Khan, none of this 'Sahib this' and 'Sahib that' between friends. I am fed to the back-teeth with British nose-up-in-the air etiquette, and if you add the Raj imperiousness, it positively chokes me! I wish I was born an Indian, a free Indian! [*flings himself on the divan*] I am all for this man Gandhi! I like his style! Walking into the durbar in his loincloth, my word, all the girls were giggling behind their ostrich plumes! So refreshing after seeing a line of maharajahs, dressed like peacocks, strutting like trained horses in a circus. Don't you agree, my friend?

Sultan Khan [*very carefully*]: I could not say, Sir.

William Winter: All right, sorry to pop it at you like that. But you know, I am in deadly earnest. We just somehow recovered from the General Strike six years ago. Labour is in Power. The pound is worth nothing, or at least Reuben's crowd have lost confidence in it. The Tsar was the King's cousin you know, and who knows, the Bolshies may take over Westminster any day! Good luck to them!

Reuben Fine [*clearing his throat*]: Maybe, maybe not, but Bill, but let's talk chess. I am sure Mr. Khan hasn't all the time in the world, and I do want to find out his views, you know, how he thinks, plans...

William Winter: You are right. OK, you fellows, let's sit all three on this divan, and I shall set up the table [*pulls a small table forward, reaches under the divan comes up with a chess set and sets up the pieces, as the others sit beside him*] There! Let's work out old Sultan's strategies. First, tell us why you pretend to know no English when you are at a match?

Sultan Khan: Sahib, I don't know English... even though Ramanuj teaches me in our off time, it is very bad... as you know. If I say something, and it is reported wrong, my master, Nawab Sir Umer Hayat Khan Sahib Bahadur will be displeased...He's very good man, none like him in all Hindustan! Who else will bring a servant to Inglestan, and make him famous, spend his own money to send me all over Europe, when I should be serving him here? He supports me and all my family when I offer so poor service. [*wipes his eyes*] Sahib, I better cut my tongue out than displease him... so you understand, I remain silent.

William Winter [*heartily*]: I wish they would follow your example in Parliament. Tell me, who is Miss Fatima? We were amazed to see another of Sir Umer's entourage walk away with the Ladies title. She wouldn't have herself photographed, anyway, you could hardly see anything but that black bundle of silk she was wrapped up in like a parcel!

Sultan Khan [*proudly*]: She is my daughter... like my daughter, I am elder uncle, so I coach her. She is good, Allah be praised that he gave her the title.

William Winter: You mean she is your niece? Her father is your brother?

Sultan Khan: Like my brother, same family, same village, Sahib, like brothers only.

Reuben Fine: Maybe, we should start by you telling us which is your favorite game. You have beaten them all – Capablanca himself, Frank Marshall, Flor, Tartakower. Was beating Capablanca, the world champion for twenty years, the high point of your wins, when you first became British Champion in 1930? Capa called *you* a genius after losing to you!

Sultan Khan [*hesitatingly*]: Capablanca Sahib, very great player. It is my honor I play against so great man, and Allah's gift I win. I remember his kindness always. I am too humble to take praise for that game, no, Sahib.

William Winter: Come off the fence, Sultan Khan! Tell us what is your favorite win? You beat Marshall, you know what they call him in New York? The Great Swindler, that's what they call him. He is the wildest fox in chess there is, he beat Lasker when he was only twenty-five.

Sultan Khan: I know, Sahib, we had heard of his strength, his power, but that day he was weak, and with God's grace I won.

William Winter: My God! You are as wily as Marshall, why don't you come straight out with it, man, and tell us which of your victories is your favorite win? Then we shall re-play it, and old Reuben here can go over every move with you. Come on now, no more dodging. You have beaten the best in Europe, so out with it.

Sultan Khan: What can I say, when so good sahibs like you ask? Ask me, a mere servant like I am a friend? You forgive me, Sahib, then, if I speak from my heart? I cannot betray the honor you do me by speaking a falsehood. But if I speak truth, you must forgive me, for you force me with kindness, Sahib!

William Winter: My God! I shall never understand you Indians! Of course, I am your friend! Of course whatever you say will not, cannot, cause any offence, old chap. Don't you see, I am sick to death of being a Sahib in your eyes? I want to be like you, a simple man! I want all Englishmen to be like you Indians! I don't care a tuppence for the Empire, and all that rot!

Sultan Khan [*in a rush*]: Sahibs, that win over Yates Sahib this year is my best!

Reuben Fine: Yates? I don't understand. You got the title all right, but Yates, he is nowhere as strong as the others, even Flor, and you beat Capablanca!... I don't see why you say it was the Yates game...

William Winter [*intervening*]: Just a minute, Reuben, I think he is trying to say something. All right, tell us why it is your best game. Let's play it. I shall take Fred Yates's part. He played Black, right? Start, and tell us everything. This is important for Reuben here, and I think very important for me also.

Sultan Khan: Sahib, I know this is my last year in Inglistan. Who knows if I shall ever come back again? What my master wishes? I know if I beat Yates Sahib, I become Champion in Inglistan for third year – I, a mere Hindustani servant! Think of it, Sahib! Yes, European masters who lose to me are much stronger than Yates Sahib, but to me that is not so important, Sahib, as beating Yates Sahib, an Englishman, in England, and becoming champion here in England! Do not be angry, Sahib, you ask, and in your honor I speak from my heart! I wish to beat many times English Champion in England!

William Winter: So, my cagey friend, you have some politics?

Sultan Khan: Who does not, Sahib? It is not forgotten in Hindustan that our Mughal Emperor was sent to live in the garage of an English Lieutenant in Rangoon, and buried there like a nameless slave! So, I think of our Hindustan and play, and this time I have the 'white forces' and the great English Yates Sahib, well, let him feel what it is like to be a black man. I never say anything of my feelings to my master, Nawab Sahib Umer, who is loyal to the English King. But I am loyal to the salt of Hindustan, which I have eaten from childhood. [*plays 1. Nf3*]

William Winter: I am beginning to understand. [*plays 1... e6, Sultan Khan plays 2.c4, Winter 2...d5*]

Sultan Khan [*plays 3.g3*]: See, Sahib, I am cautious, I still play not like a victor, but a humble man. Perhaps, in my white pieces, I see the white *khaddar topees* of Gandhiji's followers, and in Yates Sahib's black men, the police! [*Winter play 3..Nf6*] Is this not so? [*plays 4.Bg2. Winter plays 4...Bd6*] Yes, I knew the English will attack, and so you do. [*plays 5.Nc3*]

William Winter: All right, if that's what you are imagining. We move imperial police like well-trained troops. [*plays 5...c6.*]

Sultan Khan: I read in Punjab papers that Gandhiji's men and women are equally well disciplined. [*plays 6.b3*]

William Winter: I think I will call out the mounted police, just in case of any rowdyism by your lot. [*plays 6..Nbd7*]

Sultan Khan: The people protect themselves, Sahib. [*plays 7.O-O; Winter also plays 7...O-O*] And I see the police match our moves, step by step. We must challenge authority for our own right! [*plays 8.d4*]

William Winter: We shall teach you a lesson for your insolence! [*plays 8...Qe7*]

Sultan Khan: Sahib! We are peaceable people. We come only to petition for our right to rule at home. Is it not so in Inglستان? [*plays 9.Nh4*]

William Winter: We will see about that. [*plays 9...Bb4. Sultan Khan plays 10.Qc2*] You say you are protecting yourself, but we see that as rebellion! [*plays 10...Re8*] Beware, Sultan Khan!

Sultan Khan: We send forward unarmed defenseless men. [*plays 11.f4; Winter plays 11...Nf8*] You mask your forces, Sahib! We do not trust you mean us no harm! But we also withdraw. [*plays 12.Nf3; Winter plays 12...b6*] I see, you try new strategy to regain control of our land, so we must protest again, vehemently! [*plays 13.Ne5; Winter plays 13...Bb7*] Is your intention peaceful, or are you preparing to strike, Sahib? [*plays 14.Na4*] Sahib, we will prevent you from hurting our people. [*Winter plays 14...N6d7*] And you are not to be trusted. [*plays 15.Bb2; Winter plays 15...Rac8*] I thought so. Bitter experience has taught Hindustanis not to trust the Angrez! You are clever, but we see through your game. [*plays 16.Nd3*]

William Winter: [*plays 16...Bd6*] There is no point in wasting words with you. We shall move according to our Imperial interests.

Sultan Khan [*plays 17.e4*]: Even now, all we ask is that you parley peacefully with us. We are unarmed and non-violent, and our cause is 'democracy.'

William Winter [*plays 17...dxe4*]: The police must break up an unlawful assembly, Sultan Khan!

Sultan Khan [*plays 18.Bxe4*]: Sir, you are responsible, how you say, for the consequences! [*Winter plays 18...Nf6*] Sir, you should have called them back to barracks, earlier. [*plays 19.Bf3*]

William Winter [*plays 19...Bb8*]: The Empire is entirely peaceful. [*Sultan Khan plays 20.Qg2*] But we do not approve of your untrustworthy Oriental moves. So, regretfully... [*plays 20...Ng6*]

Sultan Khan [*plays 21.Rfe1*]: As Gandhiji said, this is getting monotonous.

William Winter [*plays 21...Qd8*]: You leave us no option.

Sultan Khan [*plays 22.Rad1*]: You leave us no option, either. [*Winter plays 22...Bd6, Sultan Khan 23.Ne5*] Let us withdraw before there is violent clash!

William Winter [*plays 23...Qc7*]: Now, too late you realize the folly of your insolence!

Sultan Khan [*plays 24.h4*]: We are firm and non-violent.

William Winter [plays 24...Bf8]: Let us see for how long.

Sultan Khan [plays 25.h5]: We will never make the first violent move; we want only peaceful solutions to all conflict.

William Winter [plays25... Nxe5]: And we are committed to maintaining law and order.

Sultan Khan [plays 26.fxe5]: You are provoking our people, Sahib!

William Winter [plays 26...Nd7]: I order you to disperse, or you will be forcefully dispersed!

Sultan Khan [plays 27.Nc3]: Sir, once again we want to show our goodwill towards you. [Winter plays 27...Ba8]. This is a welcome gesture. Long Live the King! [plays 28. Rf1. Winter plays 28...Be7] Why are the Angrez always so restless? [plays 29.g4; Winter plays 29...a6] Sahib, I protest, that is again a threatening offensive move on the part of your police. [plays30. g5] See, we are defenseless, non-violent, and yet we step forward without fear.[Winter plays 30...Nf8; and Sultan Khan 31.Ne4]

William Winter [plays 31...c5]: You must not mistake our benevolence for weakness, Sultan Khan. We have not ruled you and most of the world for a hundred years by being weak.

Sultan Khan [plays 32.d5]: Behold, Angrez Sahib, we offer no provocation, we are totally non-violent! [Winter silently plays 32...Qa7] We petition the Crown for our Birth Rights! [plays 33.Nf6+]

William Winter: That is no petition, villain! That is sedition! [plays 33...Bxf6]

Sultan Khan [plays 34.gxf6]: Gandhiji cannot control the crowd's anger.

William Winter [plays 34...Ng6]: You will see how we will disperse this rabble.

Sultan Khan [plays 35.hxg6]: Not everyone agrees with Gandhiji to follow the path of non-violence in India. There are many revolutionaries in Hindustan, like Bhagat Singh, who want to answer British violence with Indian violence. [Winter plays 35...hxg6] I am afraid, this is how it could all end! But Gandhiji may make a last attempt at peace. [plays 36. d6]

William Winter: To hell with all this sniveling cant. We will settle the matter with the sword. [plays 36...Bxf3]

Sultan Khan [plays 37. Rxf3]: Sahib, you have lost. Violence has got you nowhere. Your ferocious forces are all bottled up, impotent. They can do nothing. The unarmed simple people of Hindustan have triumphed; they have surrounded your troops; the Empire is at an end!

Reuben Fine [*with great interest*]: Let me truthfully, Mr. Khan, did such thoughts pass through your head as you played Yates?

Sultan Khan: May I be damned forever, Sahib, if I tell you falsehood. Even so, I thought, as I played, and so it came to pass, as if it was a message from heaven to us poor Hindustanis, to have faith in God!

Reuben Fine: I do appreciate your feelings, Sir. My people also are poor, and they were driven out by another Emperor, and they too believe in God, another God from yours... well, maybe the same God, we are both people of the Book...and I do hope the people will rise...

Sultan Khan: A strange thing happened after the match, Sahib. I was leaving the hall, when I met Gandhiji himself. He had come to see the match, and congratulated me for winning, and said I had won for India. Sahib, with tears in my eyes, I told him, he had won that match! I told him everything, what I thought when I made those moves. How I thought those white pawns of mine were his men, advancing peacefully to victory; how peacefully they bottle up the strong British forces, reducing them to impotence. He listened, asked me to show him the moves again, and then said, 'But you are Sir Umer Hayat Khan's man, and he is very loyal to the King.' I said, 'I would give my life for Nawab Umer Hayat Khan Bahadur any day, but I have eaten Hindustani salt, and I am loyal to the salt of our land.' He was very moved to hear that, and said I was right, and said just as I was true to my salt, he would see to it that the salt was ours. I do not know what he meant, but I think it was something very important.

William Winter [*completely overcome*]: My God, some of my friends in Bloomsbury should have heard you today. Gives a completely new slant on things. I think I shall go and wash my hands. [*wanders out*]

Reuben Fine [*looking at his notes*]: Tell me, Mr. Khan, I am not flattering you by saying you are a very strong player, and yet you have always lost to Bill here. Why is that? Does his game have any problems for you?

Sultan Khan [*with tears in his eyes*]: Winter Sahib feels for my people. He treats me like an equal. Me! A lowly servant! How can I face God one day after defeating a good man like him?

[*Curtain. Lights dim*]

Apple Strudel, Chess, and Ethics

by
Vithal Rajan

CAST:

Albert Einstein – a genius

Robert Oppenheimer – a genius

Subrahmanyam Chandrasekhar – a genius

The young Ramanujan Varadachary – a sort of genius, but in this play an illegal migrant helper

The old Ramanujan Varadachary – a respected centenarian Freedom Fighter of Hyderabad

Varadachary [*at the podium with spot on it, darkened stage*]: I'm honored as the last remaining Freedom Fighter, who followed in Gandhiji's footsteps, to be invited by the Hyderabad Peace & Conflict Resolution Study Group, to express my views on American sanctions against our acquiring the Atom Bomb. As a man of peace, I am for global nuclear disarmament. But does America have a right to give us orders? No! Certainly not in this regard! You know why? Because, we were involved from the very beginning in the development of the bomb. This may come as a surprise to all of you, in fact most Indian scientists do not know this, but I, your humble servant, was a confidante and advisor to Albert Einstein when the fateful decision was taken. Of course, in those days, no official position could be given to me, but I was there... It makes an interesting story. Cast your mind back to the spring of 1939, and imagine yourself in Einstein's apartment one Sunday afternoon... [*Spot goes out as he speaks, and the stage is slowly lit*]

[*Einstein's apartment at the Institute of Fundamental Research, Princeton. A surprisingly balmy Sunday afternoon, spring of 1939. Einstein, dressed famously in baggy gray flannels, his white hair standing in an uncombed halo round his head, is pottering around, while an Indian is organizing a tea trolley for visitors the scientist is expecting. A small table, with chessmen all arranged ready for play, is drawn cozily near three large shabby armchairs. A screen on the back wall for projection of the chess game.*]

Einstein: Ramanujan!

Varadachary: Sir?

Einstein: You carry a great name. So, I am confident that the tea you will be laying out will be the very best we can offer my special guests.

Varadachary: I serve to please, Sir.

[*A bell rings, and Einstein shuffles across to open the door*]

Einstein: All right, Ramanujan, you can have your own tea in peace in the kitchen. I shall call if I need you, but everything seems in order. [*Varadachary exits to the kitchen.*
Einstein ushers in Oppenheimer, a tall handsome man in well-cut suit, who hangs up his porkpie hat and coat by the door]: Ah, Opje [*pronounced Oppie*], right on time, as usual! Tell me, how's business?

Oppenheimer: My courses are going well. I have organized a special seminar of the brightest students in Berkeley, and you know what, Albert, we meet in a nearby bar to talk physics and dream!

Einstein: No, no, Opje, I am talking about real-life hosiery business you inherited. Are profits rolling in, Opje? People buying new clothes, the latest from Paris?

Oppenheimer: Oh, that business? It's textile imports, really. I leave it all to managers, going tolerably well, I believe, but why do you ask?

Einstein: Sit down, Opje, have a cup of tea, while we wait for another of my friends. It will surprise you quite! Good tea, eh? The reason I ask is if the market is doing well, it means it's not yet time for war. The market has a nose, which we Jews know all about. If there is no panic in the market, it means FDR may still bring Hitler to heel!

Oppenheimer [*sipping thoughtfully at his tea*]: I hadn't quite thought on those lines, but I wouldn't put my shirt on FDR to stand up to the Nazis. OK, his New Deal has a few socialist measures – populist palliatives – but he is still a creature of Capitalism.

Einstein: Ah, ha, Opje! What would you have? The Pentagon is purged Stalin-style, and our best soldiers sent to Salt Lake City, just before a war? I know you youngsters like radical politics, but Stalin understands nothing – you know why? He has no compassion in his heart! Compassion is what animated Marx all his life.

Oppenheimer: Come, on, Albert, this is just bourgeois liberal ideology, to make the masses feel guilty, to prevent the working class from liberating themselves!

Einstein: And you think it liberates mankind to sign a pact with Ribbentrop, and kill your experienced generals? Opje, which world are you living in? If anything will save Russia, it will be the old Kutusov plan, withdraw into the strategic depth of the Russian winter, but think of the cost. I don't wish it on the Russians, though they have never been charitable towards our people.

Oppenheimer: Stalin is buying time, Albert, while he re-arms. It's all been explained to me by Kitty, a marvelous girl, Albert, you would love her, she's all compassion like you, and yet more clear-sighted. [*hesitates*] By the way, Albert, I don't think of myself as Jewish. I'm a scientist, and I'm American.

Einstein [*gently*]: And how about the other Americans, Opje? They never think of you as a Jew? Maybe they don't, for you are a brilliant professor, and everyone knows your students love you. OK, but what about Hymie down the street, who is a pawnbroker? Or the Negroes who drive us up and down from the railway station. You can get angry, Opje, and say, who is this German to say these things about the land of the brave and the free, after we have given him shelter? I'm grateful, Opje, you may never know how grateful, for the shelter, for being allowed to work. It's very important, *nichtwahr*, to be permitted to work? Yes, very important! I am very glad I did not have to witness Kristallnacht in Germany, but for the same reason, I must look out for everyone else. No one should be kicked around, especially if you want a land of the brave and the free!

Oppenheimer [*a little uncertainly*]: You know, Albert, I don't agree with every single policy of Capitalism. Racism is as disgusting to me as it is to you! I do not tolerate it in my labs. Abe Lincoln got rid of slavery but not of all the ideas of white superiority that went with it. It's Science with a big S that's going to throw all these notions into the dustbin.

Einstein [*gently but firmly*]: And yet scientific America is the breeding ground of the monstrous theory of Eugenics. Where do you think Hitler got his ideas from? Did you know that it was seriously suggested that Jewish immigrants should be sterilized because they were intellectually degenerate! And how long before they say Chandra should be sterilized?

Oppenheimer: Who is Chandra?

[*The doorbell rings*]

Einstein: That is Chandra! Wait till you meet the brightest brain of this century! [*shuffles across to the door, and opens it to Chandrasekhar, young and handsome, wearing a beautifully embroidered cardigan and flannels, who hangs his anorak at the door*] Chandra! Come in! Can I call you Chandra, it's easier for my thick European tongue. And I am Albert. Come in, come in, and meet someone, who's just started *to think* of the ideas you developed in full form a dozen years ago as a student! Chandra, Chandrasekhar, Opje, Oppenheimer! [*The other two men shake hands a little awkwardly, recognizing the other's scientific reputation*] Chandra, at this time of day, I have apple strudel, it's the best thing to come out of Austria in recent years, apart from Lise Meitner. And a cup of tea, I'm sure you are longing for a cup of Darjeeling tea!

Chandrasekhar: Actually, I prefer coffee.

Einstein [*thunderstruck*]: I go to all this trouble, I order you Darjeeling tea, you don't know how difficult that is in Princeton, and now you tell me you prefer coffee!

Chandrasekhar: I'm from south India, we drink coffee there. All my life, everyday, I used to wait for that special cup of filtered coffee brewed by my mother. Well, I'll never get another cup from her.

Einstein [*placing a hand on Chandra's shoulder*]: I'm sorry, Chandra, deeply. I have heard a lot about her, she was a great lady. But you know what? In Germany, I always had apple strudel with Viennese coffee! And I shall pour you some from this flask! [*pours out two cups of coffee and they seat themselves*] Chandra, you unlocked one of the greatest secrets of Mother Nature when you showed that a white dwarf just over 1.4 times the mass of our homely Sun would collapse catastrophically into itself, and not continue as a safe old white dwarf. Opje here is working on something that he calls 'Continued Gravitational Contraction,' predicting that dying stars whose gravitational pull exceeds their energy production will do what you had already sensed when you were a student, except that the world was shut out from that knowledge by the imperial shadow of Eddington's. The English cannot tolerate wisdom coming from the colonies. Rutherford would not have Opje here as an assistant!

Chandrasekhar [*a little stiffly*]: I have the highest regard for Eddington, but he was wrong just this once.

Einstein [*comfortably*]: So do we all respect all the Brits. But talking about the colonies, tell me what you think of Mahatma Gandhi. He is the one man on earth who abjures the violent philosophies of the West – the cold-blooded Tsarism of Stalin – let me have my say, Opje – the murderous racist dogma of Hitler's, or the rapacious capitalism of our kindly hosts. Gandhi is a leader without outward authority; a fighter who scorns force; a wise man who devotes himself solely to the betterment of his people; a man who confronts the brutality of Europe with the dignity of the simple human being!

Chandrasekhar [*smiling*]: Albert, you have left me nothing to say. But everyone in India is not a Mahatma Gandhi. We need to get rid not only of British imperialism but also of many social evils. India is in the process of churning, and this is bringing out both poison and nectar. My wife Lalitha is as good a scientist as I am, but she could not pursue a science career there, even in my uncle's lab. I have a friend of my youth, Rajanarayanan, who could have been as great a mathematician as Ramanujan, but he is a bureaucrat now to feed his family. Will anyone realize the sacrifice he's made? No one will. These are cruel times in India.

Oppenheimer: Well, we here have littered our societies with destroyed women's brains as well, since the times of Hypatia. A man who was canonized later had her slaughtered for teaching science. Sophie Germain would have remained a French housewife if she had not fooled Gauss and Legendre by signing her papers as M. Le Blanc! And do any of our kids know that Caro Herschel was as great an astronomer as her brother, William? Sophia Kovalevskaya could only get a job as a primary school teacher, and she was Weierstrass's star pupil! I know for a fact, Albert, that young Cecilia Payne, way back in 1925, made an astonishing breakthrough in postulating the uniform nature of stellar compositions, and that hydrogen was a million times more plentiful than other elements but Henry Russell couldn't bear to be upstaged by a girl! It is the socialist order that respects the intellect, male or female.

Einstein: *Und meine liebe Lise Meitner*, who might still have saved Western civilization! Her papa was a Jewish Austrian aristocrat, who did not think girls should be taught science. She sneaked under the topmost gallery benches to attend lectures. It stands to Max Planck's credit that he gave her a job – of course only in the basement. Male assistants ignored her, or crassly called her Herr Meitner. When Rutherford visited the institute, he said casually 'I thought you were a man,' and sent her off shopping with his wife. But she had some good friends – Max Planck himself, Niels Bohr, Max Born, James Franck, Erwin Schrodinger, Max von Laue, and myself. Oh, I used to play the violin for her, and she, she would sing Brahms songs, in that damned damp basement of hers. She was *our Madame Curie*, you see? I remember walking home with her once, after going to the opera, and I was explaining, oh, you know all that business about $E=mc^2$, that energy is trapped in mass, and every radiation has mass associated with it, and you know what she said? 'It's music!' she said, 'It's the musical accompaniment to my life!' Don't you ever believe that it was Otto Hahn that produced fission – whenever he tried to speak of physics, she would say '*Sie stille, Hähnchen, von Physik verstehst Du nichts!*' And then when the right to teach 'Jewish science', or write, or do research was taken away from her by Hitler, she fled to Copenhagen a few months ago, and told Niels she had made atomic fission possible – for four years she has been splitting uranium atoms into barium and krypton atoms, or rubidium and cesium, releasing maybe two hundred million electron volts every time. She knew what that meant, twenty million times more powerful a force than TNT! Niels Bohr slapped his head and said 'What idiots we have all been!' and has rushed off to tell everybody.

Oppenheimer: Albert, you are not telling us all this just for the heck of it, are you? Out with it, there's something brewing!

Einstein: All right, but first let's have another round of coffee. And you must play me at chess, Opje, I'm looking forward to our game, see it's all laid out. Chess helps me think. Chandra can kibitz, a kibitzer is the key person in a chess game, he carries all the tension within himself, he sees both sides of the equation, he has to accept other people's mistakes. He is the guru!

[They drink some coffee, Oppenheimer sticks to a cup of tea, eat some cakes, and settle down in front of the chess-board]

Einstein: But before I move a piece, tell me Chandra what is the ultimate goal of human existence? I am asking you specifically for you come from the land of sages.

Chandrasekhar *[looking studiously at his fingertips]*: The greatest good of the greatest number... life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, that sort of thing.

Einstein *[with some satisfaction]*: And well replied, Chandra. I understand, I too am an immigrant, and we 'foreigners' must be especially careful in times of war! I have no doubt we will have a world war, not because of Roosevelt, or Churchill, but my compatriot, Hitler, who wants his place in the sun. He must finish the task undertaken by the Kaiser. Now, you are both young, you need labs, assistants, positions, but I... I am

old, I need only to think. If they shut me up, I will lie on my bunk, and think! So, I shall be frank. The search for truth and knowledge is one of the highest qualities of Man. But the mind is not our God. It is powerful, I know when I look at *menschen* like you both, but it must only *serve*. *Remember it is blind to values*. Our goal is a real community of free and happy human beings, who by constant social endeavor liberate themselves from anti-social structures. Yes, I am a socialist, we must care for each and every human being in the world. We must say every morning, yes, I am my brother's keeper. [*Plays 1. e4, and Oppenheimer replies 1...e5*]

Chandrasekhar [*almost to himself*] : I have never admitted to being religious, but I am not a materialist either. All my work, my scientific passion seems to be at the service of something outside of me. Yes, I suppose the Upanishads have left their indelible mark. So, in fact when Dean Gale would not let me teach, it didn't seem to matter, I almost half expected President Hutchins of Chicago University to sort it out, for he and I were serving the same thing. I cannot but remember that the central paradox of Newton's life is that he deliberately and systematically ignored his supreme mathematical genius and through most of his life neglected the one activity for which he was gifted beyond any man. This paradox can be resolved only if we realize that Newton simply did not consider science and mathematics as of any great importance; or, as Keynes has said, '... It seems easier to understand... this strange spirit, who was tempted by the Devil to believe, at the time when within the walls of Trinity College he was solving so much, that he could reach all the secrets of God and Nature by the pure power of mind - Copernicus and Faustus in one!'

Oppenheimer: Remember Newton did all he set out to do at twenty-three; after that his life was his. I am reminded of GH Hardy's statement 'No mathematician should ever allow himself to forget that mathematics, more than any other art or science, is a young man's game... Galois died at twenty-one, Abel at twenty-seven, Ramanujan at thirty three, Riemann at forty. A mathematician may still be competent enough at sixty, but it is useless to expect him to have original ideas.' Come on, Albert, make a move.

Einstein [*plays 2. Nf3, to which Oppenheimer replies instantly with Nc6*]: Scientists do not grow and mature continually, it's not important they do. The central vision of their lives is what matters. Think of Clerk Maxwell, who did the most fruitful and profound physics the world experienced since the time of Newton, with his kinetic theory of gases and the dynamical theory of the electromagnetic field. He finished his work by the time he was thirty and then retired to Scotland. Very wise. [*plays 3.B b5. Oppenheimer replies instantly a6*]

Chandrasekhar: You yourself, Albert at the age of twenty-six wrote three of the most profound papers of 20th century physics. the first laid the foundations for your special theory of relativity with remarkable clarity, conciseness, and coherence; the second provided a rational molecular basis for accounting for Brownian motion; and the third carried Planck's hypothesis of the quantum to its logical limit to formulate the concept of the light quantum. And that was thirty-four years ago. I do not see that age has had any effect on you.

Einstein: I needed time. In the decade leading to the first world war I was constantly preoccupied with the resolution of the basic inconsistency between Newton's law of gravitation, with its postulate of instantaneous action at a distance, and my own special theory of relativity, with its postulate that no signal can be propagated with a velocity exceeding that of light. After many detours and false starts, I finally arrived triumphantly at my general theory of relativity in 1915. So you see since I had been given only partial clarity in the beginning, God permitted me to finish my work. We are all here for a purpose, and we need to complete our task, however bitter the struggle, however thankless at the end! [*Plays 4.Ba4, followed by Oppenheimer's b5*] Opje, think before you play!

Oppenheimer: These are only opening moves.

Einstein: And therefore you must be specially careful. You think you have me pinned, but that is not so. [*Plays 5. Bb3*] Where I have always wanted to be, so.

Oppenheimer [*Plays 5...Nf6*]: Why did you send for me, Albert?

Einstein: It's obvious as my next move. There will be a war when the ground is firm enough for the German panzers. And this will not be like the first war, between imperial giants fighting for colonies. On the one side we have the dogma of hatred, of an un-German belief that Hitler's race is superior. There's nothing superior about him or his goons, except the fighting machine built up by Bismarck with the Jewish Bleichroder's money. We the Allies are stretched all over the world, thanks to Britain's mindless acquisition of colonies. We cannot rearm fast enough. Science must win the war, Opje you must win the war! [*Plays 6. O-O*] Now play very, very carefully.

Chandrasekhar [*rising wanders about the room*]: You know, perhaps, the one truly momentous discovery of mankind's was Pythagoras's - that vibrating strings, under equal tension, sound together harmoniously if their lengths are in simple numerical ratios, established for the first time a profound connection between the intelligible and the beautiful. I love to hear my wife sing. But there's nothing beautiful or worthy about war.

Einstein [*earnestly*]: That is why I admire Gandhi so much, Chandra, don't you see? But now we face a brutal European calamity, a calamity that will over-run my people, and we must send this devil to hell! Surely, in Hinduism your Gods have fought just wars?

Oppenheimer [*Plays 6...Nxe4*]: Violence is the midwife of change. Yes, we must fight.

Einstein: Good, you must fight for all that you hold decent. Already, they have approached me for my opinion. I said I shall think it through, but I know what my answer will be. We must, in our weakened state, create the invincible weapon! And you, Opje, must lead the team to make the Atom Bomb before Hitler does! [*Plays 7.Re1, followed mechanically by Oppenheimer's d5*]

Oppenheimer: Why me, Albert. I certainly want to do physics, but I don't want to be ammunitions manufacturer.

Einstein: Who else? Edward Teller, Hans Bethe? One is a rash warrior, the other is a pacifist. They cannot lead, no. You are the natural leader, Opje. You inspire people. You need to inspire a team to undertake this mammoth task. And it must be done swiftly.
[Plays 8. a4, followed by Oppenheimer's b4. Einstein plays 9. d3, Oppenheimer Nc5]

Chandrasekhar: I don't think such a weapon would ever be used over Europe. Maybe as Kipling put it over the 'lesser tribes without the law.'

Einstein [*rising in alarm*]: What, Chandra, have we made you so cynical, in so short a time?

Chandrasekhar: Not at all, and so I shall quote you Shelley:

*I am the daughter of Earth and Water,
And the nursling of the Sky;
I pass through the pores of the ocean and shores;
I change, but I cannot die.
For after the rain when with never a stain
The pavilion of Heaven is bare,
And the winds and sunbeams with their convex gleams
Build up the blue dome of air,
I silently laugh at my own cenotaph,
And out of the caverns of rain,
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
I arise and unbuild it again.*

Einstein [Plays 10. Nxe5]: Life like this game leads us to danger, to unpleasant decisions.

Oppenheimer [Plays 10...Ne7]: You think I should make the Bomb? I know I can, given my people, my rules, yes! No bumbling bureaucrat, no tiresome general in charge!

Chandrasekhar [*almost whispering*]: They will help you believe whatever you wish to believe, as long as you give them what they want. But afterwards, what then?

Einstein: We call for World Government to control all such dreadful weapons! [Plays 11. Qf3]

Chandrasekhar: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodet?*

Oppenheimer: The first thing I have understood as a student of atomic physics is the principle of complementarity. There are various ways of talking about physical experience, each is valid and necessary for an adequate description, and yet, and this is a big yet, stand in mutually contradictory relationship to each other. Why should it be any

different in politics? The greatest problem in science, or for that matter in politics, is doing justice to the implicit, the imponderable, and the unknown. I shall make the bomb, and we will take tomorrow's issues tomorrow. [*Plays 11...f6*]

Einstein: Friends, if we help make this terrible bomb, the world would have changed for the worse, and there would be only one way out. Individual states must have a guarantee that they can solve their disputes with others on a legal basis and under international jurisdiction; and further, that no state, however powerful will be permitted to wage war by a supranational body supported by military power under its exclusive command. 'Check.' [*Plays 12.Q h5+*]

Oppenheimer: All over the world, except maybe Russia, and I am not sure about it either, there are corrupt political systems depriving their subjugated people of rights, of elementary standards of living, all under perfectly legal conditions of appropriation. It is these rapacious elites that will control your world government. By making this bomb, I shall know sin – in the Biblical sense, Albert – and I shall take on this burden to force independent nations create more reasonable relationships between themselves. I don't want any one body having control over knowledge, over the terrible knowledge we will produce. As scientists our highest value is to share knowledge. [*Plays 12...g6*]

Einstein: Opje, you have to learn to control this fashionable left-wing talk. Ernie, Ernie Lawrence is already uncomfortable with your politics, I know, I've talked with him, and Ernie is key to getting you on board this project. [*Plays 13.Nxg6*]

Chandrasekhar: Despite my support for Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent *satyagraha*, I am strongly of the opinion that we must spare no effort to destroy Nazism; it's state organised in its deadly viciousness and qualitatively different to the 'free-enterprise' racism Lalitha and I encounter here. You must do everything in your power to destroy Nazism, Opje, even being more political in your politics.

Oppenheimer: Oh, I agree, I am already seeing what I must do. [*Plays 13...hxg6*]

Einstein: You are unhappy, Opje, anyone can see that. You can already see that one nasty terrible weapon will breed more, each one nastier than the last, and many more till every creature in Creation is threatened, *nichtwahr*? But you must have courage, my friend, that God neither plays dice with the universe nor with human souls! [*Plays 14.Qxh8*]

Oppenheimer: I'm troubled, for we are leading people into a secret world of concentrated power. This is the very antithesis of what we believe in as scientists. We need an open world, and men with open minds, talking with each other without barriers, without coercion, without fear. This is the precondition for real democracy – the precondition for lasting peace. And yet we are to do everything now that is revolting! [*Plays 14...Nxb3*]

Einstein: Be of single-minded purpose, Opje, don't divert yourself with stray thoughts! [*Plays 15.cxb3*]

Oppenheimer [*ruefully*]: Yes, I know, be like Arjuna. I read the *Gita* every Thursday evening with Art Ryder. What shall I do now? [*Plays 15...Qd6*]

Einstein [*Plays 16. Bh6*]: You must get out of the consequences you weave for yourself.

[*Oppenheimer plays 16...Kd7 after some thought*]

Chandrasekhar [*to no one in particular*]: I think it is the Greeks who said 'Tragedy is suffering Greatly?'

Einstein: There is something relentless about the Fates, as the Greeks discovered so long ago. [*Plays 17.Bxf8*]

Oppenheimer: The struggle to survive... but can people survive when Science, their own Promethean tool, loads one dice after another against them? [*Plays 17...Bb7*]

Einstein: If I can help at all, Opje, it's to warn you what not to do! [*Plays 18.Qg7*]

Oppenheimer: As Chandra pointed out, there seems to be a Greek inevitability about this game, and what we are about to embark upon.[*Plays 18...Re8. Einstein immediately follows with 19.Nd2*]

Chandrasekhar: I think what we are seeing here is the system of the opposition, the ruthless marshalling of forces we must take count of, if we are to reconstruct our own world.

Oppenheimer: Reconstruct with what? With weakened humanity? [*Plays 19...c5*]

Einstein: Instead of blaming humanity, maybe we should blame its leaders, especially its scientific leaders? [*Plays 20.Rad1*]

Oppenheimer: I know I am trapped, trapped by Albert, trapped by history...[*Plays 20...a5*]

Einstein: Too late, my friend! You must learn to plan well in advance of your enemies. Yes, the world of Science has enemies! [*Plays 21.Nc4*]

Chandrasekhar: I do not want to watch this game... it isn't a game any more. [*Gets up and goes to look at a bookcase. Oppenheimer plays 21...dxc4 in silence*]

Einstein: No, it was never intended to be![*Plays 22. dxc4. In silence the rest of the moves are played rapidly. Oppenheimer plays 22...Qxd1; Einstein plays 23.Rxd1+; Oppenheimer plays 23...Kc8 and Einstein plays 24. Bxe7*]

[*Einstein and Oppenheimer stand and stretch, Chandrasekhar turns around to face them*]

Chandrasekhar: The ending seems profound, but it is inconclusive.

Einstein: Precisely, it always will be inconclusive. But the steps! We are responsible for the steps, have we thought them out well? Have we behaved as scientists, with goodwill towards all, with prejudice towards none? Towards what goal? An ethical goal? Towards the goal of humanity, as we understand it? Better, towards the goal we feel as simple human beings Creation meant us for?

[Curtain. Dim Lights and bright again]

The Love Gambit

by

Vithal Rajan

CAST:

New Year's Eve In the Present:

The Older Ramanujan Varadachary – a Centenarian and Raconteur of Hyderabad
Vedavyas Sharma – an NGO leader of Hyderabad

On December 31, 1944

Humphrey Bogart – a great actor

Lauren Bacall – a beautiful actress beginning a great career

The Middle-Aged Ramanujan Varadachary – a non-legal migrant helping around

Felipe Cruz – Varadachary's son, a cook in the Bogart establishment

[Left-front of the stage. The Present. A pleasant evening in Hyderabad. Outside Old Varadachary's lower middle-class house, under a neem tree, and adjoining a school wall. Varadachary is seated on a stone bench, reading a sheaf of papers. A small chair and table, with two wine glasses, a corkscrew, and a basket of breadsticks is set out in front. A screen to project the chess game also acts as façade over the low green front-door. He is impatiently waiting for his guest]

Varadachary *[on sighting Sharma arriving with several copies of a booklet and a bulging jute bag]*: Very welcome, Sharma! I was beginning to wonder if on New Year's Eve you would come to see an old man! Well, what have you got for me?

Sharmaji: Some pre-publication copies of our book on Communalism. It has the short message I drafted on your behalf, Sir, we can still change it, if you disapprove of the wording...

Varadachary *[looking up with a smile]*: I approve. I'm not an editor, Vedavyas Sharma. You wrote it, I approve, sight unseen. What else have got for me?

Sharmaji *[bringing up a bottle from his jute bag]*: Sir, a friend of mine brought it from France, last week...

Varadachary *[opening the bottle with his corkscrew]*: A simple dependable bottle of burgundy, a Beaune Villages, but far better than anything else you can get tonight in Hyderabad. You are good to remember that conversation needs wine to free the mind. *[pours a little wine into a glass, swirls it around, and takes a sip]* Good, despite the

journey, very drinkable! [*pours more wine into the glasses*] Here! Join me, Sharma, in a toast to France, beautiful women, and better memories! I don't feel a hundred, I tell you!

Sharmaji: To see you in such good health, Sir, is itself a blessing.

Varadachary: Don't be mealy-mouthed, Sharma. You just want my name in your book, fair enough, and I exact a toll. But I am also very generous. I want to enrich your life with stories from my past. When we first met, it was the anniversary of a frustrated love, tonight happens to be the anniversary of a great successful love affair! Who in your mind were the most romantic couple of the 20th century?

Sharmaji: I really don't know... perhaps, the Kennedys, I mean Jack and Jacqueline, or Pandit Nehru and Edwina Mountbatten, or Queen Elizabeth herself and Prince Philip...

Varadachary [*impatiently*]: No, no, no! The most romantic couple were Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, without question! And you know who brought them together? Me! You are amazed, aren't you? Well, I will tell you, how it all came about. Have some more wine. [*pours out more wine*] During the war years, I was working in Warner Studios, doing various jobs, I couldn't return to India, I was a known revolutionary, as you know. They were shooting 'To Have and Not to Have,' a thriller by Hemingway, script by Faulkner, what could be a better vehicle to launch a new beauty – you have seen it? No? You should, it's worth seeing, I worked very closely with the Key Grip – anyway, Humphrey Bogart at the top of his popularity was the lead actor. Lauren Bacall was only nineteen then, a Jewish Roumanian model unknown in films, but what a beauty! I knew instinctively she should be given the lead female role, but how to bring it about? There was a beautiful picture of hers on the cover of Harper's Bazaar – world's best fashion magazine, if you ask me. I discreetly placed the magazine in front of Slim, Howard Hawks's wife, along with her tea, and cucumber sandwiches – she liked the way I cut them. That did the trick. Slim instantly decided she wanted her in the film. [*pours out more wine*] Have some more. Bogie met Betty at the door – that's what we in the Rat Pack always called her, y'know, Sinatra, Sammy Davis Junior, Spencer Tracy, Peter Lawford, me, when we dropped in late at night for a drink and a yarn at the Bogart's, or at Romanoff's on Beverley Hills – but that was long after they were married. Anyway, they met at the door of Hawk's office, and it was love at first sight! Bacall was only 19, though by then the sexist star-to-be in Hollywood. Bogie was riding on a crest after The Maltese Falcon, and Casablanca, and by then was the highest-paid actor. Betty became a star overnight after that Hemingway film. She came along at exactly the right time for Bogie. He was mature and she was a kid, and I think he had a ball showing her what life was all about. Betty Davis said that, and she played mother hen. But the problem was he was already in a tempestuous drunken marriage with Mayo – Mayo something or the other. Till he was sure of Betty, he wouldn't insist on a divorce. New Year's Eve 1944, he would pop the question, and got me and Felipe to lay out the scene in his own house.

Sharmaji: Felipe? Who was Felipe?

Varadachary [*looking down at his empty glass*]: God! How time flies! We both need some more wine – let me do the honours. Felipe – Felipe was, is, my son. Remember, I told you earlier how the British police had hounded me out of India, and I took refuge in Paris in the twenties? Well, I fell in love with Cecilia, she was a Mexican coiffeuse – actually she did Frida Kahlo's hair when she came to Paris – Cecilia had the loveliest back in the world, Aishwarya's back reminds me of hers – the most attractive part of a woman's body is her back, not her boobs! Anyway, Felipe was the result, and later I lost touch with her, you know the life of a revolutionary? We belong to the people! Imagine my surprise when years later, the fellow hunts me out, claims me, and asks me to join him in running a dinery in L.A. Of course, it failed, but he had the gift of the gab, and would get invited to cook at functions. Anyway, the important point to remember is that he and I were to prepare that eventful New Year's dinner when Bogie would pop the question to Betty! I wish you had brought two bottles, we will have to make this one last.

Sharmaji [*genuinely amazed*]: What a story, Sir! You have had a most enviable life, we have so much to learn from you...

Varadachary: All very well for you to say so, it was hard going most of the time. Anyway, where was I? [*takes a gulp*] Yes, that dinner! Felipe was a talented cook, wonder where he is now? These days you'd call it a fusion menu – we started with true black Beluga caviar on melba toast, to be followed by a choice of cold white gaspacho soup, or lobster Bisque; the rest was to be a circle of Thai dishes, very delicately spiced. I contributed a rich *Shahjahani* biryani, with saffron, cashews, cloves, and sultanas. We agonized over what dessert to serve, but the choice of wines decided that – it was to be a Hyderabadi *qubbani* to accompany the Chateau Yquem Bogie insisted on. That would be the moment she would say or no! Mind you, we started with Dom Perignon over the caviar, followed by a gentle Gewurztraminer – remember we were serving Thai, and then of course, a vintage Chateau Lafitte Rothschild for the meat. In the center of the table I'd ordered a special flower arrangement in the Tourbillons vase.

Sharmaji [*totally bemused*]: It sounds very grand, but I can't imagine...

Varadachary [*rushing on*]: Bogie had a great wardrobe, and was undecided till the end. Then, he decided he would be himself, in a plain white shirt, and high-waisted baggy pants with turn ups. When she came, she was a vision. She wore her famous crowning glory of shoulder-length curly blonde hair without a hat. Gilbert Adrian had designed a soft tweed suit for the evening to go with her reserve. America was cut off from Paris, and Adrian was Hollywood's star couturier. He gave her a short jacket, of course with padded shoulders, but without lapels, worn over a matte silk shirt with a full lace collar, and a straight skirt, as was all the vogue those days. No one else had nylons, remember those were war days, but she wore them. Leather shoes were only meant for the front, and women went around in all kinds of silly open-toed low heels, but Adrian had given her black suedes. Large pearls in platinum clasps at her ears, and a thin diamond and platinum bracelet round her left wrist was all the jewelry she had. She was very cool and distant – she loved him, no question, but Bogie had to do more that evening than sweep her off her feet, he had to commit himself. He did it with a chess game.

Sharmaji: Chess?

Varadachary: What else? They were both very brainy, evenly matched in temperament, and they fought with each other with style and humour as they were to do for another fourteen years. You won't find a mention about this famous game in her book – I guess it was too intimate an experience to write about. The game is posted for six years later. Let's drink the last of the wine carefully, and I shall tell you about that love gambit that night. Sip the wine slowly, Sharma, and imagine the scene I have already described... [As Old Varadachary speaks, Right back of stage is slowly lit. Bogart and Bacall are seated on a semi-circular divan that curves round a mahogany table with a chess-board. They are drinking champagne, and playing chess, while the middle-aged Varadachary and Felipe bring in the caviar] From the first few moves you can see how well they are matched. Bogie was clever enough to take the White pieces, and Bacall even clever to let him. [1.Bogart plays e4, Bacall e5; 2.Bogart Nf3,Bacall Nc6; 3.Bogart Bb5, Bacall g6; 4.Bogart d3,Bacall d5]

Bogart: You play like a man, kid.

Bacall: I don't play games with men, Bogie.

Varadachary: And, oh, she gave him *The Look* then, slow and sweet, from the corner of her eyes. It enslaved everyone in the forties. But they play on...[5.Bogart exd5; Bacall Qxd5]

Bogart: I knew you were a tigress. [plays 6.c4]

Bacall: What do you want big boy? A pussy cat? [plays 6...Bb4+] Check.

Varadachary: They were speaking in those low husky voices they used and America loved. Do you know there's something called the Bogart-Bacall syndrome? You would, if you were an actor trying to speak like them.

Bogart: Hell,no! You'll do for now. Hey! Ramon, more champagne! I guess I need to be drunk to win. [plays7. Nc3]

Bacall [warningly]: Bogie, If you drink you lose; you decide what you want to lose, and when. [plays 7...Bxc3+] Check again, buddy!

Bogart: If you play like that, you can come around any time! [plays 8.bxc3] Maybe I can catch my breath, while you think things over.

Bacall [plays 8...Qd6]: A lady knows when to retire, Bogie. The next move is up to you.

Varadachary: You can see how evenly matched they are in wit. They spar like two cats, but it's velvet paws all the way! [9.Bogart plays a4; Bacall Bd7]

Bogart [*plays 10.Ba3*]: Say, kid, I forgot to pussyfoot around like a gentleman. I guess I want your Queen.

Bacall: Bogie, I wasn't brought up in a ladies finishing school either. I've done everything I could to become an actress; I have trained, I've been an usherette, I've modeled, and I'm tough. So quit playing around. [*plays 10...Qf6*]

Bogart [*in open admiration*] : You are not an actress, kid, you are a star! [*Plays 11. Qe2*]

Bacall [*softly as she plays 11...Nge7*]: Imagination is the highest kite one can fly, and I've flown it for ever, and willed myself... You belong to yourself, don't you, Bogie? And to your craft? Do you have room for any more?

Bogart [*plays 12. Bxe7*]: Ah, c'mon, kid! Don't tie me up with words. I'm a straight-shooter who likes to go to the heart of things!

Bacall [*plays 12...Qxe7*]: My mother taught me the same. You can have no idea how hard she had to work for both of us. She and Uncle Charlie were all the support I ever had, Bogie. They were both very strong and always there for me. I need my friends to be there always for me. That's not too much to ask, is it?

Bogart [*Plays 13.Bxc6*]: Hell, kid! It'd be the easiest thing a man could do, to be there for you always!

Bacall [*Plays 13...Bxc6*]: Well, for a start, you could order dinner. I don't want more of this champagne.

Varadachary [*as the middle-aged Varadachary and Felipe bring in the dishes, and the white and red wines*]: She was slinky as a lynx, hot as pepper, cool as rain, dry as smoke, and then some – and he, he was totally himself. They were uniquely genuine people in a world of make-believe, that's what made the Rat Pack Club so unique, it was irreverential about everything, except, and *this was a big except*, the deepest human values the best people share. But I shouldn't get too emotional about that time, neither of them was the sentimental type. [*As he talks, Bogart plays 14. Nxe5, Bacall Bxg2; 15. Bogart Rg1, Bacall Bh3; 16. Bogart Rg3, Bacall Be6*]

Bogart [*Plays 17. d4*]: I bet I win.

Bacall [*smoothly*]: I bet I don't lose. [*Plays 17...c6*]

Bogart [*Plays 18.d5*]: You have to give me an answer, I think.

Bacall [*Plays 18...cxd5*]: All in good time, Bogie, if you are not impatient.

Bogart [*Plays 19.cxd5*]: It seems to me we make the same moves all the time, so why don't we make them together?

Bacall [*Plays 19...Bxd5*]: If this were poker, I'd ask you to show your hand.

Bogart: I'll show it to you anyway, kid. [*Plays 20.c4*]

Bacall [*seriously*]: I am much younger than you, Bogie, half your age, Natalie, my mother, doesn't like it at all. But in a way life has made me older. I don't spar about what is important. It is a simple yes, or, or no. [*Plays 20...Be6*]

Bogart [*very softly*]: You are a regular Joe, Betty. I quit fooling around, the moment I saw you. See, this game, it's locked us in together. [*Plays 21.Re3*]

Varadachary: She was very dreamy then; it was a game, and life, all rolled in together, the way they liked it. She didn't want to escape, but as a woman, she had to try. [*Bacall plays 21...f6; and Bogart 22.Nd3*].

Bogart [*as Bacall plays 22...Kf7*]: This is one game one of us has to lose, but I'll make it up to you, kid, I promise. [*Plays 23.Nf4*]

Bacall: I didn't think you were sexy when I saw Casablanca. But she is very beautiful, isn't she, I mean Ingrid Bergman? [*plays 23...Rae8*]

Bogart: It wasn't me, it was Rick. Even if it was me, I was only thinking of you, kid! [*Plays 24.Nxe6*]

Bacall [*with an angry flash*]: You didn't even know me then! [*Plays 24...Qb4+*] Check!

Bogart [*nonchalantly*]: Naw! But I knew you would come along! [*Plays 25.Kf1*]

Bacall: Bogie, this isn't a script some smart aleck has written for you. You have got me to answer to! [*Plays 25...Re7*]

Bogart [*Plays 26. Re1*]: I know, kid, I know. I'm telling you something the best way I know.

Bacall [*Plays 26...Rhe8*]: Bogie, I'm serious. My mother taught me a girl can't afford to let down her defenses before she is sure.

Bogart: I know, like I said, I know. [*Plays 27. Nd8+*] Check, kid, check my heart!

Varadachary: The rest is history, the history of the greatest romance of our times. What could she do but say yes? For all his sardonic humour and his tough guy film persona, anyone who knew Bogie knew him as kind, and generous, though untamed till the end.

[as he speaks Bacall plays 27...Kf8; Bogart 28. Rxe7, Bacall Rxe7; Bogart 29.Qxe7+, Bacall Qxe7; Bogart 30. Rxe7; Bacall Kxe7; Bogart Nxb7]

Bogart: See, kid, it wasn't so bad. We are evenly matched, in more ways than one.

Bacall: Shall I surrender to your arms?

Bogart: Before you do, and I like that, Hey! Ramon! Felipe! Clear the table, will ya? And just leave us with the Chateau Yquem, and the star-lit night?

[Curtain]

The Victory of the Revolution

by
Vithal Rajan

CAST:

Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz – President of Cuba

Senor Filiberto Terrazas – Mexican writer, lawyer, and chess master

Ramanujan Varadachary – The Centenarian Freedom Fighter of Hyderabad

Varadachary [*spot on him, darkened stage*]: I consider it an honour to be invited to lead a debate: Should Non-Violence Always be Our Policy? on this, the first anniversary of the R.S.C.A., the Revolutionary Students Chess Association of Osmania University. When I first saw the invitation from R.S.C.A., for a moment I thought it was from the Royal Shakespeare Company, where I had served as assistant director for a memorable season during the war years...but let me not digress. Friends! I have no disagreement with your point of view! This may bring debate to an abrupt end, but that's the truth. Remember, Mahatma Gandhi, my life-long leader, advocated only non-violence of the strong; if that is not possible, we should take to arms! You are surprised? Let me surprise you more! Few know – what I am about to reveal will I am sure remain confidential among this circle of revolutionaries, for obvious reasons – but I was in the *Granma*, along with Fidel and 80 others! How that came about is another story. I'd been scripting a film in L.A. on Frida Kahlo and Trotsky, but those were the McCarthy years, and I was advised to leave quietly for Mexico. What more natural than that I should join the crew of the *Granma* on its revolutionary voyage? So, you see, we are on the same side. And I taught chess to Fidel during anxious hours on that voyage, when we lost our way, and were caught in tidal waves and almost sank. The 10-berth boat I helped Cuate buy at Tuxpan could hold 25 persons at most, but we were 82! We were all in it packed like sardines, Fidel, Raul, Collado – well, he was steering so he had more room, little Pichirilo, the huge Luis Crespo, Ché, of course, Rodriguez – he was out of that boat like a shot the moment we touched ground in Oriente! Ah, what memories come back! His guerilla tactics Fidel learnt from my playing during that eventful trip, and he applied them in his victorious campaign in the fastnesses of the Sierra Maestre. Years later, in 1966, he invited me to attend the 17th World Chess Olympiad, when once again, I helped him beat no less a champion than Bobby Fischer! Well, the record books mention the opponent was Filiberto Terrazas, who was himself a redoubtable Mexican master, but he was helped all along by Fischer – it's true, I tell you, I was there...and I helped Fidel, they say the Russian Grandmaster Petrosian backed him, but no such thing, Petrosian kept mum most of the time. You want to know more? Splendid! Imagine yourself at the Olympiad, row upon row of serious chess players, and amongst, like any ordinary player, Commandante Fidel in his olive drabs, and forage cap, a large cigar stuck between his teeth, and opposite him in a neat suit, Terrazas, head bowed in concentration, and around them, Petrosian, Bobby Fischer, and me... but keep in mind also the guerilla fighting in the mountains a decade before...[*Spot dims as he speaks and slowly lights illuminate the*

stage. Havana, 1966. Open air Olympiad, with 'sketched' crowded tables, everywhere. Centre stage is the Terrazas-Castro table, with a crowd on kibitzers gathered around. Filiberto Terrazas has the advantageous white pieces. Behind against the sky is the screen for projecting the game]

Castro: Senor Filiberto Terrazas, it is an honour for me to play you at this, the 17th World Chess Olympiad. I am grateful you accepted our invitation. As a Host I insist you take the White pieces. I hope unlike Alekhine you have no objection to cigars. I never start a campaign without one!

Terrazas: The honour, Senor, is all mine. Let us make a conventional start.[*Plays 1.e4*]

Castro: I agree [*Plays 1...e5*]

Varadachary [*Spot on him*]: The first move was not easy. The problem we confronted on the *Granma* was that the pilot didn't know the coast. We planned to disembark at the town of Niquero, take the town, pick up some trucks and head for the Sierra Maestre. But Fidel was forced to order the cabin cruiser to go aground in a swamp. The swamp wasn't really that bad, the worst part was the mangrove roots, which blocked our way. Carlos Bermúdez sank up to his chest in the swamp and would have perished had not Crespo thrown a mangrove branch to him. We moved forward with knapsacks, and rifles, and then, the boat sank in the swamp, though it had kept afloat in the tidal waves with 82 of us stuck in it! I climbed up a bush and saw palm trees, the mountains and shouted, 'Let's go on, there's solid ground ahead.' At that point we were already being bombarded by Batista's naval and air forces, but somehow we managed to conceal ourselves in – imagine - a beehive! God! They were mad and we got stung! I took my first rifle off guards in the fight of La Plata, the first man I helped there was Ché, because he was wheezing with asthma, I put my arm round his shoulder and helped him walk.

Terrazas: In the land of Revolution, I must be brave! [*Plays 2.f4*]

Castro: I accept the King's gambit – your challenge. There is no victory in chess or Revolution without risk. [*Plays 2...exf4*]

Varadachary [*Spot on him, as Terrazas plays 3.Nf3*] : I whisper to Fidel, 'Attend! The SIM patrol cars, sleek and deadly, are out with their submachine guns poking out!'

Castro [*plays 3...Bd6*]: Cuba Libre! [*loud applause*]

Varadachary [*Spot on him as Terrazas plays 4.d4*]: I shout, ' Fidel! The American B-26 on a strafing run!' And Fidel says don't worry, Ramon – he always calls me Ramon- the guerrillas have the Sierra Maestre to hide in,' as he plays 4...h6. All the comrades around us can sense once again the vicious night raids of Batista's police, as Terrazas plays 5.e5]

Castro: Comrades! Have you forgotten the DR urban insurgents invaluable contribution to the revolution with their 'hit the top' campaign? [*Plays5... Bb4+*] Check!

Varadachary [*Spot on him, speaks with great excitement as if commentating on a 'live' occurrence, as Terrazas plays 6.c3*]: The police run wild after the attack on the Presidential Palace. Havana is a city under siege, it seems, on the ides of March 1957! A few students rush the Colon Street entrance, kill the sergeant on guard, and get inside the palace. The Presidential coward calls out the army! The army rushes ten tanks, numerous anti-aircraft guns and several thousand troops into the city from Camp Columbia. A group fires from the roof of an adjacent building on to the palace. Witnesses say the palace steps and patio run with blood. The walls of the patio are badly damaged by machine gun fire. For nearly three hours, tanks, machine guns and rifles fire from the palace grounds to dislodge the snipers on the roof. Near-by business houses are closed, and residents of the palace area remain in their homes behind shuttered doors and windows. Soldiers and policemen refuse to let anyone leave the vicinity. The reserves lift the siege of the beleaguered Palace garrison, before the students could kill Fulgencio Batista, more's the pity!. But their attack continues for over two hours, during which the army goes wild and firing is heard in many parts of the city. 'The people have responded as always in support of the Government to maintain order and peace,' says General Batista after he has massacred their children! Among the dead is José Antonio Echevarria, president of the student federation of the University of Havana! An American tourist is killed by a wildly fired police bullet, as he steps out on the balcony of the Regis Hotel on Colon Street, about two blocks from the palace. All airline flights into and out of Cuba are canceled! Downtown Havana that night looks like an armed camp. The streets are barred to civilians. All motion picture theatres and night clubs were closed, and censorship established by the Ministry of Communications on radio and television. The order bars the showing of any of the fighting!

Castro [*plays 6...Ba5*]: Yes, but where are the revolutionaries? They have vanished into thin air, and the army is left with a few students killed. Even the bourgeoisie are revolted!

Terrazas [*plays 7. Bxf4*]: I suit my action to your words, Commandante!

Castro: The essence of guerilla tactics is the sudden attack when the enemy force thinks it has won something! [*plays 7...g5*]

Varadachary [*Spot on him*]: I shout at this stage, 'Remarkable how chess imitates history! as Terrazas plays 8.Bg3 – the troops are withdrawn back to barracks but in disorder! Remarkable! Now I understand how even that abortive attack on the Batista barracks led to ultimate victory!

Castro [*plays 8...Qe7*]: Since my Indian comrade is pleased to draw analogies with our campaigns, may I remind all historians that a key part of our strategy was sending Raul north of the Central Highway into heavily infested Batistiano territory. For a moment I was scared for my brother, but the liberation of Cuba was in all our hearts, so I steered myself. It was the right decision. By December, all of Oriente was in Raul's hands!

Varadachary [*spot on him, again speaks like a commentator, as Terrazas plays 9. Be2 and Castro replies 9...d6*]: There are many rebel forces working against Batista and the Americans. The DR militants are active in the Escambray mountains of Las Villas province. Ché circles round Santa Clara. An armored train, a combination of two locomotives and seventeen freight and passenger cars, containing 373 soldiers and four million dollars worth of munitions and provisions for two months, departs Havana on December 23, 1958. It arrives in Santa Clara the next day and halts at El Capiro Hill. The commander of the unit, Colonel Florentino Rosell Leyva, chief of the Engineer Corps, deserts to Miami on Dec. 26th. The train is derailed on Dec. 30th, after Ché Guevara's men remove 30 feet of rails. When the officers ask for a truce the soldiers begin fraternizing with the rebels. At 7 PM, the train and its soldiers surrender to the rebels. But the moment of final victory has not yet arrived! [*Terrazas plays 10. exd6. Varadachary continues more sedately*] Danger struck at the very heart of the revolution when division erupted among the leaders of the Second Front – between Faure Chomon, the secretary general of the DR, and Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo – who had the support of a gringo – a William Morgan of the US Marine Corps!

Castro [*plays 10...cxd6*]: However, it must be remembered this division ultimately posed no threat, for the forces under my direct command were disciplined and committed and though Ché took Chomon's side, he focused on his main task: the defeat the regular army.

Terrazas [*plays 11.Qa4+*]: Check! All I can say is that if guns, armour, and airplanes win wars, you, Commandante, should have been defeated!

Castro [*plays 11...Nc6*]: You are very right, Senor Terrazas! On our side was the iron will of our people, and on Batista's side, the soldiers refused to engage with us when we stood firm!

Terrazas [*plays 12.d5*]: Is that so, Senor Castro? I remember you suffered heavy losses as well?

Castro [*plays 12...Bd8*]: Yes, that is correct. We were willing to risk all, to regroup to fight again, to run when necessary!

Terrazas [*hissing, as he plays 13.dxc6*]: You came very close to total defeat, Senor, and still you might, you are under threat in this game now, and for ever!

Castro [*plays 13...b5*]: Batista, the Americans, and you, Senor, have ever underestimated the courage of the campesino who cuts our cane! [*Terrazas plays 14.Qxb5 and Castro replies with 14..a6*] There will always be another poor campesino to replace one who has been killed! Luis Crespo was a sugarcane worker before he joined us in the *Granma*. Why did he risk his life? As he himself told me, 'In the old days, in 45 to 70 days of harvest, you had to earn enough to pay for what you ate during the whole year.' So he joined the struggle.

Varadachary [*spot on him as Terrazas plays 15. Qa4*]: See, my young revolutionary comrades, how right Fidel is! The moment of truth arrives. The bourgeois forces run for cover! [*Castro plays 15...g4*] Suddenly, it seems, the conflict is no longer in the distant hills of Oriente, but at the outskirts of Hanava!

Terrazas[*plays 16.c7+*]: Check! The last battle for Cuba is joined!

Castro[*plays 16...Bd7*]: Batistianos cannot break through the ring of the Julio 26 Group!

Terrazas [*in great excitement plays 17.cxd8=Q+*]: But all is not history, Senor Castro! This is tomorrow in the making, perhaps, a return to the Bay of Pigs, no?

Castro [*calmly playing 17...Rxd8*]: On the contrary, Senor, straight from our history books. Batista has taken his last toll of Cuban blood, that is all!

Varadachary [*spot on him*]: At this stage, I remarked to Fidel – ‘But this does not tell the full picture! What of the prisoners we take, the Batistianos? The regular soldiers who surrender? At the surrender at La Maya, I saw un-intimidated, unwounded prisoners being returned, and that too in the middle of a shooting war. The next day I watched the surrender of the soldiers from the *cuartel*. The prisoners were gathered within a hollow square of rebel submachine gunners and addressed in the twilight by Raul. ‘We hope that you will stay with us and fight against the master who has so ill-used you. If you decide to refuse this invitation-and I am not going to repeat it-you will be delivered to the custody of the Cuban Red Cross tomorrow. Once you are under Batista's orders again, we hope that you will not take up arms against us. But if you do, remember this- We took you this time. We can take you again. And when we do, we will not frighten or torture or kill you, any more than we are frightening you in this moment. If you are captured a second or even a third time we will again return you exactly as we are doing now.’ Ah! What Glory! I counted them: 242, and I watched them ride away toward Santiago in trucks and busses bearing the markings of the Red Cross on their canvas sides.

Castro[*as Terrazas plays 18.Qd4*]: I think Batista has already fled the country! [*plays 18....gxf3*]

Varadachary [*spot on him as Terrazas plays 19. Qxh8*]: Remark! Batista could have prolonged the fight, died bravely, but he flees to enjoy his corrupt riches and already you can see in Miami he creates a corrupt ring of drug dealers! This is a lesson in Revolutionary History! In Havana, the gambling and prostitution capital of the Americas, bearded ‘Companeros’ from the Sierra Maestre walk into television studios to shout a revolutionary slogan or blow a kiss! The commanders, chests out but heads modestly bowed, allow themselves to be driven around the streets in vast honking Cadillacs. The whole thing becomes more like a mad Samba. Stranded and scared Americanos are evacuated by their Embassy in chartered planes or by sea. The most obvious victims of the revolution are American junior staff who organise the convoys and are bullied by matronly ladies in jewelled sun glasses, fat, brief shorts, and peevish voices demanding immediate action to recover the sun-suits they gave to the cleaners. There are also violent

threats about 'speaking to my Congressman.' Other victims, the gamblers, nearly all American, and nearly all exact copies of each other in white suits, sit disconsolately in small hotel rooms, discuss their physical ailments, and endlessly play poker. Many gringos in Havana drink only bottled water, but there are no deliveries! The embassies run out of bread! There is hell to pay! However, the general mood is one of jubilation, a fiesta, an occasion for young men to carry weapons in a manly manner, and for girls to wear tight red sweaters over tight black skirts, for Red and Black are Castro's colours!

Castro [*plays 19...Qxe2#*]: The enemy is driven out. The liberation of Cuba is complete!

[*All the kibitzers stand and cheer, as Castro re-lights his cigar*]

[*Curtain. Lights Dim and Rise*]

The Heretic Queen

by Vithal Rajan

CAST:

Father Domenic Theotokopoulos – A middle-aged Jesuit Priest

El Greco – A famous 16th century Painter

Mr. Ramanujan Varadachary – A Centenarian Indian visiting on behalf of an NGO

Don Alonso Perez de Guzman, 7th Duke of Medina-Sidonia

Rodriego

A 16th century boy

[Toledo, Spain. Present day. Suggestion of a long austere room, with a few pieces of polished, heavy, medieval furniture. At the back a long carved table with two golden candlesticks at either end, and a screen in the middle, on which the chessgame will be projected through a laptop connected to an LCD projector. In the middle of the stage there is a small table with an antique chessboard ready for the game, and two heavy red leather backed chairs. Large French windows at left back open on to a sunlit summer garden in full bloom. Between them and the table stands a large easel with the working sketch of a medieval Spanish grandee. Father Domenic Theotokopoulos, S.J. and Mr. Varadachary enter from right, speaking.]

Father Domenic: No! No! No! Please do not call me Father, or Reverend, or by any other title. We 'Jesuits,' a name given to us in malicious jest in the 16th century, but which we now carry like a flag of honour, we Jesuits as I say detest all ostentation, ceremony, or sonorous titles. A chance to serve as God's Flying Squad is all we desire. No, just call me Domenic, an honoured first name I assure you, in Toledo. And permit me to call you 'Rama,' a name revered amongst us here, I assure you, as we revere age. This is our first meeting, but not the first, eh, between our races, or members of our order? Saint Xavier's mission in your country remains a highpoint of our service to Jesus.

Varadachary [*speaking with some diffidence*]: I too had once hoped to be permitted to enter your order...

Father Domenic: We all know, my dear Rama, that our General himself exercised his authority – his influence with you, shall we say – so that you remain a lay friend of the order, in the critical field of development, in your so interesting country. But the years you spent as a novice and among the *formed scholastics* enable both of us to discuss many matters with a freedom otherwise not possible.

Varadachary [*still speaking diffidently*]: I consider myself highly honoured you should invite me to your ancestral home, with its inestimable art...

Father Domenic [*with a chuckle*]: Ah! You have spotted that hidden work of my famous ancestor, Domenikos Theotokopoulos, better known in the art world as El Greco, the Greek from Crete. True, he was the most famous painter of his times. His paintings are the prized possessions of all the art galleries of the world. *The Crucifixion* you will find in the Louvre; his portrait of Cardinal Nino de Guevara in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; that of Fray Hortensio in Boston; the *Laocoon* in the National Gallery in Washington; his famous painting of St. Peter hangs in the Escorial Palace itself. As Jose Martinez wrote ‘to attempt to discuss his work would confuse the soundest mind,’ if one could not see its spiritual essence. He was the greatest son of Toledo, second only to the blessed Saint Ignatius Loyola, in whose order we both serve, right, my friend? We are standing in the very atelier of the great El Greco, and that sketch which caught your eye, my family has never shared with the world, and for very good reason. I myself like to work in this room, and look at it, still unfinished, standing on its easel. Come closer, let me show it to you. Remark how El Greco catches that moment of uncertainty and fear, that moment between the human desire to conquer the world for God and King, and the inner knowledge of the lack of one's own spiritual worth to undertake so heavenly a task! Have you been to the Prado, my friend?

Varadachary [*bewildered*]: I have been very busy representing SERVICE, an Indian NGO which has sent me here, and took time off only to come and see you on the advice of my friend, Sharma, but I shall certainly go to that office...

Father Domenic: My dear friend, it is a famous art gallery in Madrid, which you must visit before you go home. The finished portrait hangs there, with all the worry, the fear, the desire, and the unworthiness brushed out. It hangs there as the portrait of an Unknown Gentleman, the sitter expressly wishing it that he should never be named, after his disastrous failure. [*A Boy enters carrying a silver salver with two large porcelain bowls.*] Ah! Rama, I request you to taste hot chocolate as it is made in our house. The inestimable gift of the primitive Mayans to Christendom! Hot and syrupy thick, without milk or sugar, but, you will notice, with powdered chillies! I assure you it helps in our Spiritual Exercises, even our saintly beloved founder Ignatius Loyola found it so!

Varadachary [*trying not to make a face*]: It...it is certainly an original taste...

Father Domenic: Quite so, quite so. It will grow upon you – it is not ‘caviar to the general’ if you get my meaning. Do you play chess, my dear Rama? We in Spain imagine, after Vishy Anand and Humpy's – what a name to saddle a girl with? – but undoubtedly in memory of that magnificent Hindu Empire of yours, written about first by our countryman Domingos Paes – but as I was saying we all believe everyone in India plays chess, and plays it well?

Varadachary [*drains his bowl of chocolate with a gulp, and wipes his lips*]: I do play some chess...

Father Domenic T: Ah, ha! You like our chocolate, I see! Excellent! A Man of Natural Taste! So many people think chocolate is that sickening bar they make in Switzerland.

[*turning to the boy*] Rodriego! Get our friend another bowl. My excellent Indian friend! I am going to tell you the secret behind that painting, and it is connected to this very chessboard. My talented ancestor, El Greco, was a highly developed spiritual soul. He would have joined the newly-formed order of 'Jesuits' had he not been so badly required in the world of courts, and national affairs. After the terrible tragedy of the Reformation, he was one of the key forces that led the world back to the true Church. He was not just a 'Mannerist' as they call him, but painted – as the Bible would say – as 'one with Authority.' He has influenced every great painter since his times – Van Gogh, Gauguin, Picasso, and the post-modernists of today. He was the very artistic origin of the theory of deconstruction! He painted not people, but their souls. That is why this sketch is so interpretative. How old would you say this man is?

Varadachary: Difficult to hazard a guess – people aged rapidly in the past; but definitely well past fifty.

Father Domenic T [*with satisfaction*]: And that's what most people would say, now or then. No, sir! He was in the prime of life, not yet forty! It is fear, mixed with ambition that is turning the fringes of his beard white. He is the essential Spanish nobleman of his times, of serious mien, Christian above all else, sober in strict black, behind the glistening of the golden hilt of his Toledan sword. You would think such a person would be superbly secure in all worldly matters, but mark his compressed, quivering lips, that straggly hair pasted to his forehead in sweat, those aristocratic eyes now piteously open, asking for help from my great ancestor... do you see, my friend? [*Varadachary nods with new emotion*] I see you see, good. And the full story is right here in this book, a handwritten diary of another of my remarkable ancestors, the younger Greco! [*He opens a drawer in the table and brings out a large book clad in vellum. He and his guest sit in two chairs by the table.*]

Father Domenic [*continuing lovingly to riffle through the pages of the book*]: My great ancestor took an assistant to help him in his old age – a distant relative named Giaocchino, from Calabria in southern Italy. He taught him many things, he narrated his memoirs, which the boy noted down in this diary, he taught him the game of chess, which he loved, but, alas, did not live to see his student proclaimed as the greatest chess player of his times! Little is known of the younger man today, and that too in so corrupted a fashion that it completely protects the identity of his noble family, as was the intention! You see, the young man boy also carried the noble pseudonym of El Greco, more carefully identified as 'Il Calabrese.' He writes his famous treatise on chess *Trattato del nobilissimo gioco de scacchi* but we know now, one of the most famous games recorded in it was not played by him at all, but by his even more famous relative and teacher, who won it against that gentleman in the painting! You look bewildered my friend, and so would any man be. Well, well, I shall not keep you in suspense. That man there was the richest and most powerful man in Spain, and hence of all Europe in his time, Don Alonso Perez de Guzman, the Seventh Duke of Medina-Sidonia. His wealth he derived from his grandfather, but the power came from his Catholic Majesty, Philip the Second, the upholder of the True Church in those wicked times. However, despite his piety, the king was also a man of strong passions, and who knows better than us, poor Jesuits, how a

Great Enterprise may be wrecked by God's displeasure? The Duke had been married at fifteen to Donna Ana de Silva y Mendoza, the princess of Eboli, who was only four at that time. Such child marriages were common among the aristocracy, to secure inheritance and the purest succession. But mark the sequel – the child grows up in court, knowing she has the bluest of bloods in her veins, and already married to extraordinary wealth. She is as much at home in the Escorial as the king himself, and is constantly seen with him, as she buds into beauty. And then, when she is barely ten – suddenly – the Pope gives an extraordinary dispensation for her marriage to be consummated immediately. But why? The maids in waiting whisper about a long delayed period for this prematurely developed beauty – the king wishes no scandal, but of course there is one, at the Escorial, among aristocratic circles, in Spain, and elsewhere, news being carried by officious ambassadors. Since that time, Don Alonso is granted extraordinary favours by the king – from a sense of guilt, who knows? But a tragedy is played out in Christendom when he is appointed Lord High Admiral of the Ocean-Sea, on the death of that truly great mariner, Admiral the Marquess Santa Cruz, in February 1588, just six months before the Great Enterprise to conquer all England, break the hold of Protestant heresies in Europe, and make that proud willful woman, Elizabeth, succumb to his majesty's wishes!

[*Varadachary for once is silent not knowing what to say*]

Father Domenic [*continues*]: You are amazed, my friend, that I speak so frankly of a secret at the heart of Spain's fall from power, and a loss suffered by all Christendom herself? Do not make the vulgar mistake of considering us Jesuits as worldly politicians, we are not! *Vere frustra impugnata qui apud impios et infidos impietatis arcessitur cum fidei sit magister*. How true! Few have truly understood what the blessed Saint Ignatius Loyola meant when he asked us in the order 'to be like corpses.' The instruction was not meant to make us into mindless automatons, as so often portrayed by the heretical enemies of the Church. No! It meant that gradually, through the Spiritual Exercises he taught us, we break all attachment to worldly matters, even the venal sin of wishing away corruption from the acts of those we once loved or respected. We are attached only to Jesus, and we look at all human acts of frailty in the cool blue light you find in the paintings of the great El Greco! [*Father Domenic rises pulling up Varadachary by the elbow*] Come! Let us go and look at the superb flowers in the garden this summer, while Rodriego and I translate freely from this book, which for good reason has lain unknown to history or literature in this table for almost four hundred years! [*The three of them go out into the garden, Rodriego carrying the heavy book. The stage darkens, and only the light voice of Rodriego is heard in the darkness reading from the book.*]

Voice of Rodriego: This is the secret diary of Giaocchino, also known as Greco, the Younger of that name, termed Il Calabrese, who leaves behind all his earnings, goods, chattels, and properties whereof he is possessed to the good fathers of the Society of Jesus in Toledo, alas, wishing too late he had heeded their sad advice. This diary is left as instruction and warning to the posterity of my family. None of them may make it public on pain of receiving my curses. After a youth spent in comfort in the house of my ever revered relative the Great El Greco himself, and receiving knowledge of all the arts and

sciences from his own hands, bloated with pride at my own fame as the master chess player of Europe, I lost all shame, discontinued the Spiritual Exercises the good Jesuit fathers taught me, and indulged in all sins, wherefore I now lie dying still in the prime of youth...

Voice of Father Domenic[*cutting in impatiently*]: Yes, yes, Rodriego! The penalties of sexual excesses are no longer a matter of wonder in this day of AIDS. Read from the pages where he describes the game El Greco the Elder played with Don Alonso, Lord High Admiral of the Ocean-Sea, almost on the eve of the departure of the *Grande y Fellicissima Armada* - the Great and Fortunate Armada – fortunate in being allowed to do God's work – to conquer heretical Protestant England! As he reads, imagine, my dear Rama, the two seated at that chessboard, discussing the Great Enterprise, drinking chocolate supplied by a boy assistant, whether it was the younger Greco or not, we will never know.

[*Lights come on to discover El Greco and Don Alonso, dressed as grandees of 16th century Spain, seated at the chessboard, with bowls of chocolate in their hands. A boy assistant sits in a corner, writing in a large vellum-clad book*]

Don Alonso: I come to you, Sir Domenikos, on this the ninth day of March, the St. Christopher day for the Greeks, for is he not the patron saint of mariners, and one of the Lord's chosen holy helpers, and moreover one who was privileged to carry the Christ Child on his back? I am sore troubled and need your advice.

El Greco [*easily*]: That is hardly to be wondered at, Don Alonso – it is just a month since you were made Lord High Admiral of the most powerful navy in the world; soon it will be fully under your control, and you will be at ease.

Don Alonso [*very seriously*]: God knows, and you do, Sir Domenikos, I took up this responsibility only because His Majesty insisted, and it is God's work; our blessed father Sixtus, the Fifth of his Name, has reconfirmed the Papal Bull that our most glorious King should drive out Protestant heresies from England, which he is 'to have and to hold as tributary and feudatory to the Papal Chair.' I have re-read most carefully the document *Damnatio et Excommunication Elizabethae Reginae Angliae*, [*pulling a document out of a capacious pocket*]; there is no doubt that woman is cut off from unity with the body of Christ, and see here, here, the Pope commands 'all and every, the nobleman, subjects, people,' all in fact to help overthrow her heretical rule under pain of 'anathema.' I have no choice but to obey!

El Greco: Do not fret so, Don Alonso, everyone knows you are not a sailor, but the King commands it and the Pope wishes it, and you must think of the coming sea battle as a penance, shall we say, for the greater glory of God. Come let us play. Chess is not a mere game, in the playing of it we commune with our very souls, and who knows but God may show you a way today to win your sea battle, and ferry across the Duke of Parma and his troops from Flanders to make England all yours! Think on it, Sir! What a blow you would have struck for Christendom!

Don Alonso [*eagerly*]: Yes, yes, I dream of such a victory often. My ancestors were surnamed El Bueno for driving out the Moors during the Reconquista. If only, if only, Sir Domenikos, God would grant me this favour of destroying this heretical Queen... but I fear upon my soul, I am all unworthy.

El Greco: Don Alonso, we are all unworthy, and yet we receive His Grace. Come, Sir, make the first move. I give you the white pieces. In chess as you know, white wins more often than naught. Let this game be a good augury of victories to come!

[*Don Alonso moves1. e4, El Greco e5. Don Alonso moves2. f4*]

El Greco: A brave move, the King's Gambit, as befits a brave captain moving into strange waters. Tell me, Sir, are all goods, guns, armour, and victuals requisitioned and ready in all respects for the navy?

Don Alonso [*happily pulling out another piece of paper*]: In this respect, I am more than confident, Sir. I have looked into this matter in great detail myself. We will sail with 130 ships, just imagine a fleet of 130 ships, and 30,000 men, 30,493 men to be exact! Of this magnificent array, we have 22 of the greatest fighting galleons in the world, half the fleet are transport ships with many large 'urcas' carrying siege guns for the land battles which will of necessity have to be fought by Parma's army of another 30,000 soldiers. I shall carry enough food to sustain us for six months - 11 million pounds of ships biscuit, 600,000 pounds of salt pork, 40,000 gallons of olive oil, 14,000 barrels of wine. I have even thought of 5000 extra pairs of shoes for my men, for I know even in a day's hunting expedition, broken footwear can spoil everything. And for the future governance of that island I take with me 19 justices and 50 administrators. You will be glad to know, Sir Domenikos, 180 priests will travel with me to reclaim that land for Christ!

El Greco: Sir, you are indeed a worthy commander of the Enterprise of England. I, on behalf of that black-hearted Queen – since I play her hand – will resort to desperate measures and accept your gambit. So! [*plays 2... exf4*] You may be sure, Sir Commander, her spies taking advantage of our open-handed guileless ways, have informed her of the real strength of your force.

Don Alonso [*smiling slyly with a finger to his nose*]: We are not so innocent, Sir Painter. Her kingdom is in disarray. Several faithful men of God eagerly await our coming. A certain clerk, the son of a good Catholic alderman, living not far from Oxford, that nest of false clerks and heretics, has been a regular student these past three years at Cardinal Allen's Collegium Anglicum, first at Douai in France, and now at Rome. He is in our pay, and keeps us fully informed.[*pulls out another paper*] I have his latest report here signed in his hand 'Gulielmus Clerkue Stradfordiensis,' you may see?

El Greco [*frowning thoughtfully, rejecting the paper*]: Have a care, he is not a double traitor! What is his calling?

Don Alonso: A student, nothing more. He fancies himself a poet. He scribbles plays. No, there is no deceit in him, I warrant you. [*plays 3. Nf3 with some confidence*]

El Greco [*plays 3...g5*]: I place little store by such tittle tattle. On the field of battle it is cunning and courage that win the day. Mark, Sir, how the enemy is bravely engaging his little ships against your giant fleet. What else can my Lord Howard do?

Don Alonso [*plays 4. Bc4*]: We are men of the true faith, and hence my bishop will show us the way!

El Greco: [*plays 4...g4*]: Have a care, Don Alonso, the English boats are in your midst, they are fast and they threaten!

Don Alonso [*joining gleefully in the other man's fancy, plays 5. Ne5*]: It is we who are swift. The wind sits in our quarter. I see my fleet assemble soon off the Lizard tip of Cornwall, and bottle the English Fleet in Plymouth!

El Greco [*excited, plays 5...Nh6*]: Yes, but now the wind which kept them bottled shifts and that black knight, Sir Francis Drake, is out in force in support of his little ships! Beware!

Don Alonso [*plays 6. Nxg4*]: Sir, I shall engage with the enemy without fear, for our cause is just. I have not forgotten, Sir, that that pirate Hawkins raided our colonies in the West Indies in '62 with his cargo of pestilential slaves stolen from Africa, and again and again in '64 and '67! Our ships were impounded in Plymouth in '68 and our cargo stolen. And with that money, in that same year this heretical dissolute queen helped William of Orange raise the flag of revolt against the King in Flanders. In '72 when our fleet fought a life and death struggle with the Turks at the battle of Lepanto, the damnable heretic Drake raided our colonies on the Spanish Main. And what is the cause of all this treachery? Our generous King had supported that Elizabeth against revolts, secured her throne, and offered her his own august hand in marriage. Well, Sir, I am determined he will mount her, as a mistress, before the year is out!

El Greco [*coolly plays 6...Nxg4*]: Keep a cool head in battle, Don Alonso. They are heretics, but courageous to desperation.

Don Alonso [*plays with venom 7. Qxg4*]: Right! No quarters given or taken.

El Greco [*plays 7...d5*]: Beware, beware! The chessboard points to the danger lurking in the English little ships.

Don Alonso [*laughing, plays 8. Qxf4*]: It is you ,Sir, who worry too much. They are but chaff before my sword.

El Greco [*gravely plays 8... dxc4*]: Sir, you have martyred your bishop?

Don Alonso [*very excited plays 9.Qe5+*]: He goes straight to heaven in the Lord's cause. Behold! We are winning! Check to the heretic Queen!

El Greco [*softly plays 9...be6*]: She too has her black bishop.

Don Alonso [*plays 10. Qxh8*]: My forces have broken through into the English Channel. Parma's army, the best in Europe is at hand! Victory is only a few days away!

El Greco [*plays 10...Qh4+*]: Don Alonso, never underrate that woman's forces, or their courage. You have captured no safe harbour, but are to leeward of your enemy outside of Calais! See, they threaten your main fleet, even at the moment of their greatest danger!

Don Alonso [*almost soothingly plays 11. Kf1*]: Fear not, Sir Domenikos! The danger passes, we are well protected.

El Greco [*plays 11...Qf4+*]: The enemy is desperate in extremis.

Don Alonso [*very sure of himself, plays 12. Kg1*]: There is nothing to fear. We outnumber, we outgun them. [*El Greco plays 12...Qxe4*] See! I told you, their force is spent! [*plays 13. h3*] I have sounded our general advance.

El Greco [*in the despairing voice of a 'seer,' plays 13..Bd5*]: Sir, he focuses fire at the very heart of your fleet. I see it! I see it all, in my mind's eye. You are caught between the English and the sandbanks off Gravelines. Flee, Don Alonso, flee, but to where? There is nowhere to go but on to those cold rugged coasts of death!

Don Alonso [*shaken, plays 14. Qg8*]: I still have most of my force intact...whence comes danger? Enlighten me, good friend, I beg you!

El Greco [*in an awful whisper as he plays 14..f5*]: Those dreadful little ships of fire...

Don Alonso [*plays 15. Qg3*]: God defend our right!

El Greco [*continuing in a whisper, plays 15...f4*]: ...the mighty shall be laid low, and the lowly put on high...

Don Alonso [*plays 16.Qf3*]: You had me shaken for a moment with all that eerie prediction, but now we grapple ship to ship, in good Spanish fashion, and our galleons are higher, and I have 30,000 soldiers to board those little ships and slaughter the misbegotten sons of heretics.

El Greco [*continues in a whisper, plays 16... Qe1+*]: They will not grapple with your ships, my friend.

Don Alonso [*bitingly, plays 17. Qf1*]: God's Wounds, but I shall grapple them to death, I say!

El Greco [*speaks dreamily and plays 17...Bc5+*]: For some reason we do not understand, we can never understand, God lets the heretic, the infidel, win. Otherwise there never would be so much misery. Perhaps, it is His Great Love for us, to let us share in His Sorrows for our sins, which we commit, and yet we pretend He cannot see them...? [*Don Alonso in total silence plays 18. Kh2, followed by El Greco's 18...Qg3#*] Your fleet is destroyed, my friend.

[*They spend a few minutes in silence looking at the board, and then rise together. Solemnly El Greco walks Don Alonso to the door*]

El Greco: Do not take this too much to heart, dear friend. Perhaps, it is God's way of warning you what could happen, what to avoid. Yes, that is it, it is His warning, His direction.

[*The stage darkens and the voice of Father Domenic is heard*]: Who knew then that the chess game would foretell the awful fate of the Armada? The English fire-ships set amidst its glorious galleons by a simple Cornish lad, Prowse, the long chase northwards from the sandbanks off Gravelines, its wrecking on the rugged coasts of Ireland, and the loss of three-fourths of its men and ships? My dear revered Rama, you may wonder why I read you this piece out of so many other stories in the book? There is a reason. You go from here to England, to meet your other donors. Very good. But you will be asked to attend their celebrations of the Victory of Trafalgar, when once again a heretical nation triumphed over a Christian one. I wanted you to know, as a faithful friend of our order, how even God's work can remain undone if we, His servants, remain impure. We have to be 'like corpses,' away from the temptations of the world, as our founder Saint Ignatius Loyola, of blessed memory, so lovingly admonished us. Alas! King Philip the Second was a man of passions, and unworthy. Let us try to be worthy, dear friend.

[*Curtain. Lights*]

The Filming of Das Kapital

by
Vithal Rajan

CAST:

Ramanujan Varadachary – The Centenarian Freedom Fight of Hyderabad

Mr. Vedavyas Sharma – an NGO leader of Hyderabad

Mr. Shankar Melkote – Director the Little Theatre of Hyderabad

Dr. Vithal Rajan – a member of the Little Theatre group

A Big Man from Bollywood – incognito in Hyderabad

Other sundry walk on parts not yet decided on...

[The present, one evening in Shankar Melkote's hospitable home. Whisky and chips have been served for everyone, except the Big Man, who is expected any moment.]

Melkote *[laughs into his drink]*: You have all been asked to take part in a unique film. He is expected at any minute, and I – and in fact, all of us – have been *emphatically* requested not to name him to anyone else, or even address him by name when he is with us. I don't know why not – after all, we all know who he is, but these Bollywood Moghuls insist on total secrecy before the launch of a new production – after that, it is all publicity, publicity all the way. Hey, hey, hey! So, please remember, *He is Mr. Naidu only*. What is the film on? Let him tell you himself. *[Commotion at the door. The Big Man enters, perspiring in a large over-flowing white kurta and huge pyjamas, shakes hands with everyone, bends a foot to try and touch Varadachary's feet, and heaves himself thankfully into a very large chair that creaks under the strain. He wears a large kumkum on his forehead, and a very large ring with nine precious stones in it. Two of his gunmen quickly go round the room, and then slink out at a wave of his hand]*

Big Man: Shankar! I am very, very grateful, you got all our friends here despite short notice. I apologize. For next round, my plane will be waiting for you at airport and all of you will be *my guests* at Sun n' Sands in Bombay. But now, I want to check out a brilliant idea of mine. The Filming of Das Kapital! What a stunning concept! It will be the iconic film for generations, when Bollywood takes over Hollywood – or what is left of it! What is there, anyway? All the great studios gone, gone the glamour, the stars – they are all into political correctness. Hollywood finished, I tell you!

Melkote *[bright-eyed]*: It's a stupendous concept – it, it, it is the retelling of the history of colonialism from the people's point of view!

Big Man: Shankar, how right you are! I had my team research the period, in total secrecy of course. *Arre* yaar, they knew it backwards, we have all been in the communist movement, right, from the IPTA days, right? Balraj Sahni Sahib, Azmi Sahib would be proud of us. We pick a moment in time to anchor the film. I've picked period of The International, around 1866-67. Austro-Hungarian Empire is being beaten by Germany.

So, we can have great battle scenes. And great theme! Small nation of hardworking, singing Germans defeat decadent Empire! We are already evolving story line, and I am casting Aamir Khan, commander under *Jhansi ki Rani*, who escapes after her death – all this will be shown in flashbacks before credits – escapes to Germany, who are enemies of British, and leads cavalry charge at the battle of Keoningsberg to defeat the Austrians. You see, Aamir is actually disciple of Marx who wants him to use his energies to liberate working class, but he is a young hero, impetuous!

Rajan: It's a grand vision, no doubt, but there seems to be too many focuses...

Big Man: Focus! Showcus! Pocus! A great film has to be a great entertainer. Nothing like well-shot battle scene to entertain people. Look at biggest grossers, and you will understand. But you are right, focus is on Marx. Remember Satyajit Ray Sahib's *Shatranj ke Khilladi*? Saeed Jaffrey and Sanjiv Kumar are rock steady as two Awadi nawabs while their kingdom falls. I made a note then, and I'll use it now, but in different way. As battle swirls, camera on circular track will wheel round Marx playing chess with Meyer, life-long friend, who however is committed capitalist! There is tension, there is drama, opposition of two world systems! *Lagaan* got its popularity from Indians love for cricket; but now do you know, every street in Bombay has its chess club! This will be the biggest film of the century, I tell you!

Varadachary: Rama – Mr. Naidu, I mean, we need a love interest, otherwise no one will come.

Big Man [*beaming*]: Varadachary *garu* you are a gem. We in India are blessed to have such seniors. Of course, I have thought of it! Aamir has secret interest in defeating Austrians – he is in love with one of their Turkish slaves. We are talking with Aishwarya, Kajol, Tabu – it's really a question of dates. Saroj Khan will choreograph The Dance of Liberation at the Schonbrunn Palace. Wait till you see it!

Rajan [*primly*]: The Austrians did not have any Turkish slaves.

Big Man [*kindly*]: *Arre Doctor Sahib*, who knows? The Austrians say the Turks had slaves, it is possible they also had female captives, no? There is no one history – now we have new historical philosophy, everything is possible and most probably happened, read Foucault, OK? [*he pronounces the name as 'Fuck-all'*]

Sharmaji [*eager to join in*]: Naidu *garu*! I have an idea. Aamir Khan and Aishwarya – I hope it is Aishwarya – are childhood lovers who grow up in the same village. My center will make an ideal set. My village women are very good at rustic singing, like *choli ke picche keya hai*...

Big Man: *Arre bhai*, that is A.R. Rahman's department, I've handed whole matter to him, he will decide. London went mad after Bollywood Dreams, so we will have fusion music all the way – this is not just Bollywood, this is Globalwood film!

Melkote[*thoughtfully*] : Naidu *garu*, everything depends on who plays Marx. Marx is the central character, everything is shaped around him.

Big Man[*briskly*]: Right, and it is decided. I said no one but The Big B. Just think of it! He is world's best actor, *yaar!* And what a role of a life-time! A mature role, the role of a world *guru!* And for Meyer, his fast friend and capitalist opponent, we must have a Western star. Remember with this *film* we take over Hollywood. I have thought of several, Robert Redford, Dustin Hoffman – I had almost decided on Bruce Willis, he would bring a sense of threat, a hidden agenda, but then Gérard Depardieu has agreed. He is the correct choice – a staunch Frenchman, who is torn between his friendship for Marx and his hatred for Germans, someone whose antagonistic traits make him comic. We need comedy mixed with valour, it's part of the *masala*.

Varadachary: Everything is so well thought out, Rama – Naidu *garu*. What is there for us to add?

Big Man: *Guruji!* That you give your consent to the idea is itself the greatest help. Such a learned group, all of you, you like it? Good! This is my strength. But let's work it out a little bit, right now, with your permission, Shankar. Why don't you and – and Dr. Rajan sit separately at this little table, playing chess. You Shankar will play The Big B playing Marx, and Dr. Rajan, if you don't mind, you are Depardieu playing Meyer. Right? Right! Let's see how the film will progress. [*changes in the seating take place, and the Big Man hands Melkote and Rajan their scripts*] Here are your scripts, you can read from them as you play the chess game.

Marx [*in style*] : *Bahut dinse Chatrunj nahin khele hain.* We have not played chess for a long time, M'sieu Meyer. This time we decide the fate of Europe!

Meyer [*hamming it*]: *Doost! Chalo!* More than the fate of Europe hangs on this game. If I win, you give the hand of your daughter Laura in marriage to my son, Paul Lafargue! He will not live, my friend, without her hand. *Rehem karo!* Have pity on young lovers!

Marx: *Kabi nahin!* Never! *Meri Beti, aur Frenchman se shadi? Nahin, Nahin!* My daughter can never marry a Frenchman! Rivers of blood have flowed between our people – this can never be. Even if I agree for sake of *doosti* friendship, it will break my mother's heart.

Rajan: Henrietta Pressburg, Marx's mother, died in 1863. I'm speaking as myself, not as Meyer?

Big Man: She is alive, she is alive! A few years this way, that way, makes no difference after two hundred years! Continue.

Meyer: Otherwise, my son's blood will be on your hands! For how many ages will you continue this *dushmani*, this enmity? You've challenged the greatest players in the world and won, now I challenge you, for the life of my son!

Marx [*sternly, Bollywood style*]: On your own head be your son's blood! I have never lost at chess and I never will!

Big Man: At this stage Laura in London and Paul Lafargue in Paris sing a duet, she sends him a pigeon with love message, but Aamir Khan captures bird, and misunderstands that his love, Lara, has sent message to Paul; hence lot of complications, in anger Aamir Khan wants to kill Paul Lafargue who is finally saved by Marx, so all ends well.
Continue.[*Screen lights up on back of stage for chess game*]

Marx: Let us face each other like men. [*Plays 1.e4*]

Meyer: Ah, No Frenchman shirks from the joy of battle. [*Plays 1...e5*]

Marx: You know why the proletariat will beat capitalists? We are organized! [*Plays 2.f4*]

Meyer: And who taught you organization? Us capitalists! [*Plays 2...exf4*]

Marx: But the working class plans for a better tomorrow, not just for greedy profits today! [*Plays 3.Bc4*]

Meyer: *Bachchu!* Sonny Boy! There's more to life than sloganeering! [*plays 3...g5*]

Marx [*as from prepared text*]: Only the German working class can lead the revolution. The French need a drubbing. If the Prussians are victorious then the centralization of State power will give help to the centralization of the working-class. German preponderance will shift the center of the working-class movement in Western Europe from France to Germany, and one has only to compare the movement of 1866, until now, in both countries, to see the German working-class is theoretically and organisationally superior to the French. [*plays 4.Nf3*] Do I say this?

Big Man: Yes, for authenticity. Trust me, this will get us an Oscar!

Meyer: Ah, Dr. Marx, may I quote you also? 'It is a great fact that the misery of the working classes has not diminished from 1848 to 1864.' Am I right, *mon ami*? So permit me to prove it! [*plays 4...g4*]

Marx [*hisses*]: Proudoniste! [*plays 5.O-O*]

Meyer [*coolly*]: With the greatest of pleasure. [*plays 5...gxf3*] *Oui*, we French are proud of *M'sieu* Proudhon, and why not, *s'il vous plait*? If not in this century than in another the world will discover that small is beautiful, and production by small cooperatives of women in the Third World is best for a world with an energy deficit...*merde*, I cannot say these lines! I speak now as Gérard Depardieu, his flamboyance does not go with this philosophy.

Big Man: You think he will object? Ok, if he does, we change the lines. Yes, something like... we French are proud of Proudhon and behind him stands Napoleon himself!

Marx: *Bien Sur!* The ugly fight in the General Council of The International among the French themselves, with the Proudhonists refusing to accept Lefort as their Press agent in Paris, and Le Lubez at loggerheads with Tolain, convinced the English trade unions that the French workers wer nothing but a pack of Bonapartists! [plays 6.Qxf3]

Meyer: And what support did you get in The International, Herr Marx? Permit me to tell you that at the height of your power, the total income of the so-called General Council was fifty pounds! [plays 6...Qf6]

Marx: How like a capitalist to measure a revolution in money! Apart from Britain, the center, we had 58 branches in Germany, even in France 36, there were 30 sections in America, and the Spaniards claimed a membership of 20,000 men.[plays 7.e5]

Meyer: You always put your faith in the German working-class, and yet your friend Engels said the German labour movement's attitude to The International could best be described as *platonic*! [plays 7...Qxe5]

Marx [again as from prepared text]: And why? Because the partition of Poland has led to the domination of Russia over Prussia. I have explained to the German Workers Educational Association time over time the crucial nature of the Polish Question. I even agreed to the funding of a German legion to fight the Russians in Poland! The German working-class does not yet understand that its greatest duty is to seize political power.[plays 8.d3]

Varadachary: Rama – I mean Naidu *garu*, this is getting heavy, it's interesting chess but heavy politics.

Big Man: You are right, I see it right away. We will cut in with Aamir Khan leading the Marx legion to victory over Russian troops and reuniting Poland. He and Aishwarya, Kajol, whoever, clinch in the great cathedral at Warsaw.

Rajan [in flat voice]: The reunification of Poland took place only after the end of World War One.[plays 8...Bh6]

Big Man: Less than fifty years later in a corner of Europe, right? This makes a better film.

Marx: I warn against that barbarous power whose head is at St. Petersburg and whose hands are in every cabinet of Europe. [plays 9.Nc3]

Meyer: But you support the British presence in India? [plays 9...Ne7]

Marx: Not fully. I was the first to call the 'Mutiny' the First War of Indian Independence. [plays 10.Bd2]

Meyer: But what of England, your base? Does The International exists there? Be honest Herr Marx! [plays 10...Nbc6]

Marx [*in deep sorrow*]: For once my French friend, you have touched a raw nerve. I explained to the English proletariat that they will never achieve anything until they have got rid of Ireland, whose agriculture and infant industry they have helped to destroy in the interest of their masters. The Irish question haunts them, as the Polish question haunts the Germans. [plays 11.Rae1]

Meyer: Maybe, but the British Trade Unions helped our striking bronze workers win in Paris, and they now call themselves the positivist proletariat.[plays 11...Qf5]

Marx: But at the Brussels conference I shall still make hay out of the Proudhonist asses!.[plays 12.Nd5]

Big Man: I don't like it. It is like a seminar! No! Definitely not! What do you say Varadachary *garu*, Sharmaji? We must have a fight sequence at least, or I will go crazy! Yes, that's it, like the fight in *Shatranj ke Khilladi*! The Big B and Depardieu fight it out all over the place, breaking pots, tipping over carts, breaking through doors, till The Big B sits on Depardieu's chest and helps him up.[Meyer here to play 12...Kd8] Then he realizes the villains are the English. They shake hands and their friendship is as of old. A song of brotherhood – I think on horseback?

Marx [again as from prepared text]: In my Address to The International I said ' In all the countries of Europe it has become a truth demonstrable...that no improvement of machinery, no application of science to production, no contrivance of communication, no new colonies, no emigration, no opening of markets, no free trade, or all these things put together, will do away with the miseries of the industrial masses...[plays 13.Bc3]

Meyer: But Mazzini fomented a revolt against your leadership. [plays 13...Rg8]

Marx [shouts]: He is no revolutionary like Garibaldi! He hates socialism, even free thought![plays 14.Bf6]

Meyer: And Bakhunin? [plays 14...Bg5]

Marx: A mere sentimentalist! Though, not a Russian spy. Despite his many thoughtless babblings, he has at last acknowledged my tremendous services to the cause of socialism. [plays 15.Bxg5]

Meyer: But Herr Marx, even faithful admirers like Liebknecht only wanted to subordinate your International to their own narrow German aims, is that not so? [plays 15...Qxg5]

Marx [*in grand manner*]: The history of the International merely repeats the general lesson of history that the obsolete tries to reinstate and confirm itself inside the newly achieved form. Voila! [*plays 16.Nxf4*]

Meyer: Even Paul Lafargue whom your daughter loves opposed your views on centralism and called them despotic. [*plays 16...Ne5*]

Marx: I laughed at him, as did all his English audience who understood not a word of his French. [*plays 17.Qe4*]

Sharmaji: Here Paul should turn the tables on Marx and run away with Laura, while his father-in-law-to-be is being feted in the conference. There will be time for a song; and a dance by English peasant girls. [*Meyer to play 17...d6*]

Big Man: Excellent idea! It shall be written in. Marx is very angry! What does he do?

Marx: As I told Engels when I wrote the Address to the International: *Fortiter in re, suaviter in modo* [*plays 18.h4*]

Meyer: Beware, Herr Marx! You have been too sure of yourself before. First, when you put your trust in the Reform League; then again, when you joined hands with the League of Peace and Freedom. [*plays 18...Qg4*]

Marx: And in this coming confrontation with France, if Germany wins, then French Bonapartism has had it in any case, and German workers will be able to organize themselves on a far broader national basis than ever before, *n'cest pas, m'sieu?* [*plays 19.Bxf7*]

Meyer [*needling*]: Ah, but you also talked about a powerful movement among the English workers to bring down Gladstone! [*plays 19...Rf8*]

Marx [*wildly*]: Yes, I prophesy more! A later war – a *war of races* – a war with the combined Slavonian and Roman races. It will happen after a short respite. [*plays 20.Bh5*]

Meyer: You must admit the impotence of the working class, Herr Marx. If the Paris working class rise against the Germans, they will be crushed. [*plays 20...Qg7*]

Marx: The *Commune de Paris* was not the result of any preconceived plan, M'sieu. The National Guard filled the void when the French government withdrew to Versailles. The Guard held immediate elections by manhood suffrage, and set up the Council of Public Safety on the model 1792. [*plays 21.d4*]

Meyer: I thought we were sticking to the Austro-Prussian war, now we have gone beyond the Franco-German. This is me, Depardieu or Rajan, what you will. [*plays 21...N5c6*]

Big Man [*quite impatient by now*]: It is all one war. Aamir Khan is victor in all of them. That is the power of cinema.

Varadachary: Rama – Naidu *garu*, the camera is not bound to follow every move. I suggest that the next moves should be played during a great dance sequence with Aamir Khan and Aishwarya, or whoever, and Laura and Paul; as they dance, we also see the moves [*Marx plays 22.c3, Meyer a5; 23. Marx Ne6+, Meyer Bxe6; 24. Marx Rxf8+, Meyer Qxf8; 25. Marx Qxe6, Meyer Ra6*] This is the Dance of Destiny. Let's go forward. [*everyone applauds*]

Marx: The victory of the proletariat is inevitable! [*plays 26.Rf1*]

Meyer: Perhaps, but do not underestimate the resilience of the bourgeoisie. [*plays 26...Qg7*]

Marx: There is sadness mixed in my victory; like the victory of Rustum over Shorab. [*plays 27.Bg4*]

Meyer [*humbly now*]: Great Hero! Learn to be generous in victory, like Sikander! [*plays 27...Nb8*]

Marx [*plays 28. Rf7*]: Your son Paul Lafargue is my son from today! [*They embrace*] *Mere Bhai! Mere Doost! My Brother! My Friend!*

Big Man: I know what you will say: Will it run in Peoria? I went there specially to check. They loved it. Big Indian community.

[*Curtain*]

Chess as Felony

by
Vithal Rajan

CAST:

Ramanujan Varadachary – The Centenarian Spiritual-Revolutionary of Hyderabad

The 70-year-old Ram Varadachary – A felon in the Virginia State Penitentiary, USA

Ashok Varadachary – his grandson

Vedavyas Sharma – an NGO leader in Hyderabad

Claude Bloodgood – a lifer in Virginia State Penitentiary, and chess champion

[*Varadachary and Ashok are sitting outside the old man's house on the stone bench one evening, drinking a bottle of red wine, joking, and playing chess, when Sharma comes by*]

Varadachary: My dear Sharma, meet my grandson, who lives in Bangalore. He has come to visit his old grandfather, and very thoughtfully brought a case of good local red wine. Here, you are just in time to join us. [*Sharmaji and Ashok shake hands*]

Ashok: I am very glad a good friend like you is taking care of grandfather. Sometimes I worry at his living all alone, but he doesn't want to move, and says he is quite happy in his old home.

Varadachary: My grandson is a very good, kind fellow, not like his rascally dad. I have not seen Gopal in thirty years, not after that imbroglio he involved me in. And apart from writing a few formal letters saying how sorry he was for the trouble, he has just not bothered!

Ashok: That's not fair, Granddad. Whenever I see him in America, he does enquire very solicitously about you, and has sent money from time to time, whatever he could afford. He is worried that if he comes to see you, there may be some problem with the Indian police – you know that.

Varadachary: Has the police of any country stopped me from going anywhere I liked, or doing anything I wanted to do? No! That's the difference between a revolutionary and a sneaky businessman. [*swallows some wine*] But I admit some of the fault is mine. I was not around when he was growing up, and boys without their fathers don't fare well. Do you remember, Sharma, I once told you that I was in the entourage of Sir Umer Hyat-Khan Tiwana in London during the Round Table Conferences? Well, poor Poonam was in the same household, she was a great cook. What more natural than our falling in love? Sir Umer had us married, but when she returned to India, I stayed back, I had some work in London. When Gopal was born, she took the baby to see my people in Madras and stayed with them for a while, but since I could not return, she went back to the Punjab, leaving behind Gopal. He grew up wayward.

Ashok: Did you ever find out what happened to grandmother?

Varadachary [*vaguely*]: I lost track... I was always hoping to bring her back home after Independence, but then Partition occurred. I heard she had died, but others said she embraced Islam and married someone local. I hope she is alive, and one day you may visit her, and find yourself a good strong Punjabi wife in Pakistan! Let us drink to that!

Sharmaji [*lost in admiration*]: What a colourful life you have had Varadachary *garu*. If only I had had a tenth of your experiences...

Varadachary: You would regret it! This fellow's father landed me in jail! Have I never told you that story? It's an object lesson not to be too trusting, even with your own son. Ashok, my good fellow, open another bottle, I'm afraid I've been too quick with this one. [*They solemnly fill three glasses, touch them together in toast*] One day in 1971 I was sitting here quietly when I received a long letter from Gopal saying I must come to America, he was longing to see me, he had made money, we could live in luxury, and so on and so forth; then within two days Air India calls me and says they have a ticket for me to go to the United States. I had not been there since the fifties, in any case, I wanted to see my dear son, so I went. He was staying in New Jersey, very comfortable apartment I can tell you, and we had very good times together. The fellow drove me all over the place, and took me to the best restaurants. America is the land of business and he was in a successful paints business, importing, exporting, that sort of thing. We here put up with any kind of whitewash, we cannot even afford oil emulsion – look at the state of my walls – shabby, but out West everyone is very particular about shades of colour, so a paints business is a very good business to be in.

Ashok: Dad is no longer in it. He imports spices.

Varadachary: Which is what he should have done from the start, instead of getting involved in some shady deal. Anyway, after six weeks or so, he started saying he wanted me to see my old haunts in Europe. He had arranged everything with a travel agency, two weeks in the capitals of Europe all paid. It was a most wonderful, thoughtful gesture, how could I say no? So, I graciously accepted. The night before I left, he gave me a file of papers, all about paints, latest specifications he said about a new system, and would I hand it to a business colleague in Amsterdam? Mind you, I did look through them, just to make sure, but it was all very technical, so I said yes, of course. That was my biggest mistake!

Sharmaji: Why, Sir, what happened?

Varadachary: Ashok here, of course, knows the whole story. I was arrested at JFK Airport as a spy by the FBI! It seems those specs I was carrying were some kind of military secret. How can there be anything secret about paints? But there it was, and I was hauled up as a spy. In the court, naturally I said I was innocent, the papers had been dumped on me, and so on and so forth, but I would not tell them who gave them to me, I could not betray my own son, so I took the rap. That fellow kept discretely away. You see

he was in a legitimate business, while the FBI had my record, and decided I was in with the Russians! *Me!* If they had said the Chinese, that would have been closer to the truth. Anyway, I was in jail. Nasty business, just like you see in films. But the Civil Rights people were very active, and pleaded since I was an old man, I was then seventy, and of good behaviour, I should be transferred to one of those new model prisons. That's how I met Claude.

Ashok: If you are going to tell us the story, you may as well tell it properly.

Varadachary: I was transferred to the Virginia State Penitentiary, which had made a name for itself as a progressive place for *correction*, not just punishment. It had a huge chess club going, the Governor himself was devoted to chess, so naturally I was sent there. And the champion prisoner was this Claude Bloodgood – actually he was a Mexican, Klaus Bluttgutt – but you know the Americans, they anglicize every name. I became Ram, *Ram!* Claude was a really good player. Later, I heard that by 1996 he was ranked second only to Gata Kamsky, so you see he was good, and he was a good organizer of tournaments also. He and I became thick friends, and kept up a correspondence till he died a few years ago, poor Claude! He was there, poor fellow, because in a family quarrel, in the heat of the moment, he did something and someone died. He was in there for life, but everyone liked him, especially the Governor, who was very proud of his ward, I can tell you. Claude in his lifetime played over three-thousand games, and won over ninety percent of them. Here's to Claude! Great Chess Player; Great Escaper! [*they clink glasses*]

Sharmaji: What escape?

Varadachary: Ah, Ha! I am coming to that! As I told you, the Governor was very proud of us chess playing lads, and would send us out with a guard to participate in tournaments. We created quite a sensation, we were media worthy, you see. So everyone was lulled into a feeling of security. In 1974, late one evening, Claude and I were being escorted by George – George Winslow - a friendly guard, who was himself a chess enthusiast, to some tournament. It was a boring train journey, slow and stupid, so George suggested we play chess. I was kibitzing over George's shoulder, sitting beside him on the berth, with Claude in the front seat. Ashok, set up that game, let Sharma see what exactly happened [*game projected on a screen over the front façade of the house*] Now let's pretend, Sharma is George, I am sitting beside him, and you, Ashok are Claude, you sit in that chair in front. Right! Let us now imagine the game...

George the Guard: [*Bloodgood plays 1.g4*] Why do you always play these crazy openings, Claude? [*plays 1...e5*]

Bloodgood: To throw people off the scent.[*plays 2.Bg2*]

George the Guard: I don't believe they really help you. I think it's your strong middle game that wins. [*plays 2...Bc5*]

Bloodgood: You are wrong George. Everything counts from the very beginning. Chess is a mental game by which one person overpowers another. [*plays 3.h3*]

George the Guard: OK. But conventional play gets you there faster.[*plays 3...Qh4*] Like this. In three moves, I have a strong position.

Bloodgood: Play and see, George, but be on your guard![*plays 4.e3*]

George the Guard: OK, now it's getting conventional, and understandable.[*plays 4...Nf6*]

Bloodgood [*plays 5.d4*]: As conventional and safe as you like it, George. But it is the unconventional move that wins, George, just wait and see.

George the Guard: I play by the book. [*plays 5...exd4*]

Bloodgood: I'll also play the same, but beware of the trap![*plays 6.exd4*]

George the Guard: Don't bluff, Claude![*plays 6...Bd6*]

Varadachary: Remember, I am kibitzing! I miss no word, no humourous warning of Claude's, no meaningful look. George is fully absorbed in the game, I am pressed against him, eagerly looking on!

Bloodgood: I warned you, George, but you would not listen. You have to listen to yourself in chess, George, and watch yourself. Only you yourself can win or lose. This time you lose! [*plays 7.Nf3*] Your Queen is trapped. You are trapped!

Varadachary: At those words, I slipped George's gun out of its holster, and tossed it to Claude. You see, George had never taken me seriously, since I was a timid old man, just as he ignored that knight's hidden potential. We tied up George comfortably, stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth, and got off at the next station. It was that simple. Claude and I parted on the platform. He got caught in two weeks, after a roaring time, but I made my way quietly north to Canada, got hold of an Indian passport, and got back home safely. Claude had a great memory. He played exactly the same game against one Mizesko in 1975, but naturally our game on the train never got recoded. I heard much later that the FBI did manage to catch the real culprits of that paints drama – thankfully not Gopal – but I never could go back there, since I am an escaped felon. Like Papillion, what? So, here I am in genteel poverty.

[*Curtain*]

The Parable of the Chess Game

by

Vithal Rajan

CAST:

Ramanujan Varadachary – The Centenarian Spiritual-Revolutionary of Hyderabad

Vedavyas Sharma – an NGO leader of Hyderabad

The Spirit of Mahatma Gandhi

The Spirit of Leo Tolstoy

[Varadachary is sitting disconsolate on the stone bench in front of his house, when Sharma appears, a little uncertainly]

Varadachary: Sharma, come, I didn't expect you, but you are most welcome. I couldn't have looked for a better friend.

Sharma [*sitting down*]: I apologize for not bringing a gift, as I wanted to...

Varadachary: No, no, Sharma, no drinking today. Here, have some coffee I have brewed. Last night I had a most disturbing dream. I remember every detail. I met Gandhiji and Tolstoy in Heaven; it is an omen, Sharma, my days are numbered. And I have only now become a centenarian! I should at least have twenty more years granted to me according to the laws of nature – all mammals live ten times longer than their age of puberty.

Sharma [*earnestly*]: Sir, the dream foretold that you will go to Heaven. That is the positive message.

Varadachary [*remaining disconsolate*]: That was certain in any case. [*drinks some coffee by tilting up his head and pouring it down his throat*] Curious thing about that dream, Sharma, I was called to Heaven to play chess with Tolstoy. And as we played he shared his doubts with Gandhiji. No doubt at all, Sharma, my gurus are calling me, and I must go. [*is silent for a bit clearly mulling over his dream*] I think I must tell you the dream, Sharma, so that you can record it for posterity. Otherwise, why did you come by after such a long absence?

Sharma: Sir, I came to consult you about a new programme we are launching...

Varadachary: Sharma, I am beyond these earthly consultations. Listen. I was wafted up to the clouds, and there was Tolstoy and Gandhiji sitting on clouds, wearing light blue robes, just like they show in silly cartoons. No harp, but a chess-board balanced on the cloud. I also sat down quite comfortably, I tell you, there's a lot more solidity in a cloud than we think. It was not hot, it was not cold, not dark, nor too bright; just right in fact.

Imagine the scene, Sharma, and I, as cool as a cucumber among the greats! Imagine...*[light fades on the two and another bare part of the stage is illuminated, showing Gandhi, Tolstoy and Varadachary sitting on sky-blue cushions round a chess-board]*

Tolstoy *[with great affection]*: Ramanujan! Ramanujan! What a beautiful name. Why cannot Europeans pronounce this Hindu name, instead of changing it to *Ram*, Ramon, Rum? Ramanujan, I have called you here to help me re-play an old chess-game I once played with my translator, Aylmer Maude, when he visited me at Yasnaya Polyana. Slowly, over the years, I had come to repudiate all violence, whether committed by man or the State. The moral journey started with my book *What Must We Do Then* and reached enlightenment with *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. I reminded myself 'But I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil; but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' I struggled with this thought when I played against Alymer, but could not overcome my nature completely. We must play the game again in the company of this good man, so that we may find the path of God.

Gandhi: Yes, show us the parable of the chess-game.

Tolstoy: You are right, as ever, my dear Gandhi. We must seek the parable of our times. I enlisted in the army when I was twenty-four. Through our campaigns in the Caucasus against the Chechens, we officers played chess as a war game, how to defeat the enemy, how to wrest from him our pound of flesh, wreak vengeance! Later, at the age of fifty, when I converted to Christianity, I found the taste for chess would not leave me. Why could I not get rid of this atavistic desire to hurt, to conquer? Then, by the time I had finished *The Resurrection*, I realized that while playing chess we also participate in a mental struggle, between alternative ideas, and beliefs to which we hold dearly. Could chess show us the way to victorious passive resistance? It was a novel thought, and I have wrestled with it ever since.

Gandhi: You were excommunicated by your own church after you wrote *The Resurrection*.

Tolstoy: Yes, by churchmen who present a great contradiction between what they believe and the principle on which their lives are built: for if once the law of love is not valid, then there remains no law except the right of might. In that state Christendom has lived for two-thousand years. Churchmen have yet to understand that the Law of the Prophets all hangs on Love, or in other words, the striving of men's souls towards unity and the submissive behaviour to one another that results therefrom represents the highest and indeed *the only law of life*. Socialism, Communism, Anarchism, Salvation Armies, the growth of crime, freedom from toil, the increasingly absurd luxury of the rich and increased misery of the poor, the fearfully rising number of suicides-are all indications of this inner contradiction in the Church.

Gandhi: I learned how to develop 'soul-force' reading your books, but also from the principles of the Gita; by adhering to *ahimsa*, or nonviolence, *asteya*, or non-covetousness, *aparigraha*, or non-possession, and *brahmacharya*, that is, celibacy...

Tolstoy: Like you, it took me years. I whored for fifteen years of my youth, though I wept, when as a boy I was first dragged to a brothel by my brothers. I should never have poured out all to Sophia. It was too much for her delicate nature...I regret she could never forgive me.*[is lost in thought, and then starts softly, as if reciting]* Do you know, I modeled Kitty in Anna Karenina on her, as I first saw her when she was seventeen... *the charm of her little fair head, poised so lightly on the shapely girlish shoulders, and the expression of child-like serenity and goodness. That child-like innocence of expression, together with the slender beauty of her figure, made up her special charm, which he always remembered; but what struck him afresh every time was the look of her gentle, tranquil, honest eyes and, above all, her smile, which never failed to transport him into some enchanted world, where his heart softened and he felt full of peace.*

Gandhi: I loved Kasturba very much. I could not stay away from her even when my father lay dying...But if the Tolstoy Farm was to succeed, became a haven for satyagrahis, *we had to renounce conjugal life*. You see the resistance was breaking up against fingerprinting of Indians and enforced registration in the Transvaal, and we needed a center, for spiritual purification and penance to resist successfully. Herman Kallenbach bought the thousand acres near Johannesburg, and I became the leader of around eighty souls living there, forty young men, twenty women, children. I had to show the way, to be strictly celibate, to prevent even any thought of immorality. I forced upon myself the greatest strictness. When a young man looked longingly at a girl's hair, I forced myself to cut it off publicly.

Tolstoy *[gently]*: I prayed that God help you and other dear brothers and co-workers in the Transvaal! And so your activity in Transvaal, it seemed to us, at the end of the world, was the most essential work, the most important of all the work being done in the world, for Passive Resistance is of very great importance, not only for Indians but for *the whole of mankind*.

Gandhi: I also learnt three truths reading Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. First, that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. This I knew already. Second, that the lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, all have the same right of earning their livelihood. This I had begun to realize, though dimly. The Third, that the life of labour as a tiller of soil or the handicraftsman, *is the life worth living*. This had never occurred to me before. At Tolstoy Farm, we put all three into practice. I became, as Robert Payne, wrote, the chief judge, the chief sanitary inspector, the chief teacher in the children's school, the chief baker and marmalade maker. I was always fastidious about hygiene. For nightsoil, we dug one-foot deep square holes; a small spade was the means of salvation from a great nuisance. They called me affectionately the '*Mahabangi*.' We stitched our own clothes in thick blue cotton suited to the bush, and we learnt to make sandals. Once I made eleven in one day! The farm came to us with one dilapidated building with four rooms. We built three new buildings, one for men, one for women, and

another for office, workshop and school. I was the teacher, without any textbooks. I was their textbook. We grew our own food; bread made from wheat ground in an iron handmill; groundnut butter made from roasted nuts; marmalade prepared from the supply of fruit on the farm; and cereal coffee made of baked wheat and water – food that put our bodies in harmony with Nature. All of us, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsees, we worked against the infection of intolerance, and to view one another's religions and customs with a light-hearted charity. We learnt how to live together like blood-brothers, and studied the Bible, the Koran, the Avesta.

Tolstoy [*thoughtfully*]: Yes, only thus can we free ourselves. When I wrote *The Slavery of our Times*, I found that the slaves of our times are not only all those factory hands who *must sell themselves* completely into the power of the factory owners in order to exist, but all the agricultural laborers are slaves, working, as they do, unceasingly to grow another's corn on another's field, or tilling their own fields only in order to pay bankers the interest on debts they cannot get rid of. And slaves also are all the innumerable cooks, porters, housemaids, waiters, who all their life long perform duties most unnatural to a human being, and which they themselves dislike. Slavery exists in full vigor, and we do not perceive it! I wanted to give my estate to my serfs, but Sophia and the boys refused to let me. I was escaping from my past, when we exchanged those letters, and I regret I could not respond to you as I wished, for I was fell sick at Astapovo.

Gandhi: You died like a pilgrim, in a little wayside railway station, without family or friends.

Tolstoy: And you, like the martyr you always were!

Gandhi: What then is the parable of the chess-game?

Tolstoy: That even in the semblance of war, victory can come to the peaceful, to those who embrace only passive resistance. Ramanujan will take the role of Alymer Maude, with the black pieces, or the side of my own dark self. Will you? All right. The beginning will be quite conventional, as you will see. [*plays 1.e4, Maude e5*] I now offer a pawn, fearlessly, as my resistance. [*plays 2.f4, Maude exf4*] As you see, he is aggressive in a military way. What shall I do? Again, I resist, passively. [*plays 3.Nf3, Maude g5*] My opponent is unrelenting in his aggression. So, I move with my religious leaders, my bishop. [*plays 4.Bc4, Maude g4*] And he attacks!

Gandhi: Extraordinary, how every act of life, even in this chess-game, can teach lessons. 'Ye hypocrites, ye know how to discern the face of the heaven; but ye cannot discern the signs of the times' – Matthew 16.3.

Tolstoy: Indeed ! That is the very purpose of this game, only when I played with Maude, I could not see so clearly. [*plays 5.Ne5*] I still avoid all conflict. I have made a point, and I move away without giving scope to violence. But Maude, ah, he must use force! [*Maude plays 5...Qh4+*] They that take the sword shall perish by the sword, so again I retreat. [*plays 6.Kf1*] Maude attacks my bishop! [*Maude plays 6...d5*] The reply to this

move caused me agony, for the first time I used force. Was there another way? Why did I let my darker side gain the upper hand? [*plays 7.Bxd5*]

Gandhi: As you know, the rule in Tolstoy farm was strict *ahimsa*, so that even Europeans gladly adopted Vegetarianism. We refused to permit any hunting on our farm. I even laid down the rule that venomous snakes should not be hurt, and yet, once I had to permit the killing of a mamba. We discussed it, we said it was unavoidable *himsa*, since the children were at risk.

Tolstoy: I once argued differently, that even if an armed maniac threatened children, we had no right to take his life, since we do not know, can never know, what he would do. Is an animal, like a poisonous snake, not to be trusted more than a crazed man? It is sane, it wishes us no harm, it only seeks a way out of our house to go free into its wild?

Gandhi: The same thoughts troubled me, and I have never resolved it. But the truth is that faced by an emergency, I ordered the *mamba* to be killed.

Tolstoy: And I took away this pawn, though to me this was no ordinary game without consequences, but one that revealed me to myself.[*Maude plays 7...f3*] In the light of my failure, Maude's continued attacks pale into ordinariness. I make way for his attack.[*plays 8.gxf3; Maude Qh3+*] I offer no armed resistance. [*plays 9.Ke1; Maude g3; 10. Tolstoy plays d4*] I resist not. I make room to move away. [*Maude plays 10...g2; Tolstoy plays 11. Rg1*] 'And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. Give to every one that asketh thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.' [*Maude plays 11...Qh4+; Tolstoy plays 12.Ke2*]

Gandhi: How beautifully you reveal the strength of *satyagraha*! I wish I had taught chess in the ashram.[*Maude plays 12...Nh6, Tolstoy 13.Rxg2*]

Tolstoy: No, my friend, this game should have been a model, where without taking one single piece I ensure victory for peace, but the truth is that our life is a mixture of good and bad, and it takes till our death-bed to distinguish one from the other! [*Maude plays 13...c6; Tolstoy 14. Bxh6*] And if I am forced, I am also ready to sacrifice.[*Maude plays 14...cxd5; Tolstoy 15.Bxf8; Maude 15...Kxf8*] I now confront my opponent with my truth against his warlike nature.[*Plays 16.Qe1*] And he withdraws for the first time, like Atilla from the gates of Rome! [*Maude plays 16...Qe7*]

Varadachary [*spot on him, turning to Sharma*]: I swear, Sharma, all this I dreamt as clearly and vividly as I am talking to you!

Tolstoy: Mark the next moves.[*plays 17.Nc3;Maude f6*] My next move, Gandhi, is like your killing of the snake in your farm [*plays 18.Nxd5; Maude Qd6*] I now move my Queen two steps only [*plays 19.Qg3*] and victory is achieved with all my opponent's major forces intact and unharmed.

Gandhi: You have demonstrated in this parable the non-violence of the strong, which I sought all my life and never found. Bernard Shaw was wrong when he said yours was only of sacrifice, yielding and weakness; of passive resistance to evil; while mine was of strength and severity; of satyagraha or firmness in truth. I would tell him now Tolstoy's non-violence had truly the greatest firmness in truth.

Tolstoy: Do you remember still the words of Adin Ballou, the great American Abolitionist of the Civil War? 'Let us have the spirit of the Millennium, and do the works of the Millennium. Then the Millennium will have already come. Ought not each true Christian's heart be a germ of the Millennium? Is not the Kingdom of Heaven 'within' and 'among' men?

[Slow dimming of light as Tolstoy speaks. Curtain]